Chronicles

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A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

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Under the Glass

Catharine Savage Brosman's critique of *The New Yorker* ("*The New Yorker* Under the Glass," *Vital Signs*, March) is a welcome respite from the nasty, nonsensical scribbling of today's cultural critics. I'm sure Dr. Brosman is aware that infantilism and mediocrity prevail not only among popular literary editors and "American consumers of print, electronic media, and entertainment," but among literature professors, who, of all people, should know better.

I recently completed graduate studies in literature and in law. In which department did I read Sophocles, Shakespeare, Melville, Tolstoy, Kafka, Yeats, and Dostoyevsky? If you guessed literature, you were wrong. American law schools have become an unlikely site for a return to major Western writers and traditions.

On the other hand, I learned from my English professors that literature courses are for "scholars," not enthusiasts (as if a person couldn't be both). Students shouldn't love the Great Books, mere marketing devices with an oppressive, ideological logic. I learned that aesthetic taste is a product of social engineering and that books, like grammar, are markers of class and therefore dispensable. (Perhaps this explains the "degraded grammar" that has become "house style" at *The New Yorker.*) I learned that students should resist institutions—religious and academic—that appropriate art and enable and affirm hierarchical structures. And, of course, I learned that literary studies concern the function, not the form, of writing.

What I didn't learn was why the general public prefers the Great Books, how professors manage to grade papers (after all, grammar and style are tools of domination, and rankings indicate status and standing), or why contemporary "Theory" is unintelligible to anyone without a Ph.D. in English.

Unintentional irony is business-as-usual in the literature profession. English departments are so entrenched in simple-minded liberalism that their constituents no longer know what a conservative is. (Once, my entire classroom erupted with laughter when I mentioned antiwar conservatives. Everyone thought I was joking.)

Our liberal educators don't educate. Worse, they can't educate—they lack the requisite knowledge. And they don't know where to find that knowledge, since they dismiss out of hand the habits, customs, and foundations of Western civilization.

Dr. Brosman's articles—to say nothing of her poems—are rare delights in this anything-goes age of chicanery and charlatanism. Believe it or not, some of us young readers appreciate taste, clarity, and distinction, despite what we are taught in school. Dr. Brosman is right: Eustace Tilley should drop his monocle and set aside his dress clothes. And when he does, I might just steal his outfit. I'd look better in it anyway.

—Allen Mendenhall
Marietta, GA

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Insuring Profits

by Scott P. Richert

THAT CRY you heard on the night of March 21, when the 216th vote was cast in favor of President Obama's "healthcare reform," was the sound of insurance executives rejoicing before lighting their cigars with $1,000 bills. As *Time* reported on March 24, "Health insurers have long argued for tougher government mandates that would require more of those who are generally healthy to get health insurance, which helps spread the risk in the pool of insured." "Spreading the risk" is actuarial-speak for "increasing profits." Just as Big Pharma was the chief beneficiary of President Bush's Medicare prescription coverage bill, so Big Insurance has Barack Obama to thank for their coming years of plenty.

And thank him they will, as well as the senators and congressmen who voted for the bill. But don't worry about those who voted against it; the insurance companies will hold no grudges. They will spread their newfound wealth throughout the halls of Congress to ensure that no future healthcare reform will undermine their privileged position.

Of course, the Republicans who opposed the bill knew that, which is why they spent all of their time talking about abortion and other side issues rather than attacking the biggest corporate-welfare plan in American history. When all is said and done, this gift to the insurance companies will dwarf the bailouts of the banks and the auto industry. So the Republicans had to pull their punches, because they wanted to make sure that they would get their cut of the cash, too.

And it won't be the insurance companies alone who are spreading the campaign contributions around Washington, D.C. In a show of true bipartisanship, the Democrats threw in plenty of pork for Big Pharma as well, closing some gaps in Bush's Medicare prescription coverage, requiring employers to provide drug benefits, and keeping Chinese-made drugs out of the American market (because, after all, the bill was about lowering healthcare costs). The drug companies will show their gratitude, too.

Or maybe it's the other way around. Big Pharma and Big Insurance have been greasing the skids in capitals national and state for years, and, as Timothy P. Carney pointed out in the *Washington Examiner*, President Obama "had received more money from drug companies and health insurance companies than any politician in the history of the country."

The big losers, of course, are the businesses that face fines if they do not provide adequate health insurance to their employees (Caterpillar estimates that the legislation will cost the company $100 million, which likely means that its next plant will be built in Mexico or China rather than in Illinois), and those who are self-employed or work for small businesses exempt from the requirement to provide insurance. Like the businesses, they will be fined unless they purchase health insurance.

In the worst position will be those who do not currently have health insurance because they truly cannot afford it. They will be eligible for tax credits to make their mandatory insurance more affordable, but those tax credits will be nonrefundable, so if they owe very little or nothing in taxes, the credits will do them little to no good. They still won't be able to afford health insurance, but now they will be forced to pay a fine—a minimum of $95 or one percent of their income (whichever is higher) in the first year, ratcheting up to a minimum of $695 or two percent of their income by 2014.

Come this fall, the Republicans will be able to campaign safely against the new law, and they will undoubtedly succeed in picking up a significant number of seats in the House and possibly the Senate. But they will never make any serious attempt to repeal this legislation. And by 2012, the opposition of those voters who are eligible for tax credits will have died down. Those who will be fined because they truly cannot afford insurance are among the least likely to vote anyway. President Obama staked his political future on this vote, and he is more likely now to be elected to a second term (after another campaign financed, of course, by significant donations from Big Insurance and Big Pharma).

As awful as a single-payer national healthcare system would likely be, the United States has adopted something worse. The only consolation that those of us who oppose both Big Government and Big Business can look forward to is the coming consternation of those liberals who sincerely believe that ObamaCare is an attack on the "criminal" and "evil" insurance companies and the first step toward a single-payer system. It won't take long for them to realize that it is, rather, a major step backward from what they truly desire.

A single-payer system could only come at the expense of the insurance companies, and they are never going to give up the great gift that Obama and his colleagues have handed them, on a silver platter lined with 30-40 million new insurance premiums. The crumbs from their table that will fall into the campaign coffers of both parties will be enough to make sure that any additional healthcare reform will never threaten to put out the insurance executives' cigars. ◆

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New From Israel

THE DISPUTE over settlements has "transformed the American-Israeli connection and forced Israel to face new international realities." Israel and the United States are facing "the worst split" in decades, a former Israeli foreign minister asserted, and the tremors may turn very soon into an earthshaking shift, "unless the Israeli government moderates its position on settlements." Israelis will have to make some hard choices, according to an influential Knesset member: "Never in the history of the relations between two states has a major superpower, in return for nourishing and supporting a distant and small second state, been ridiculed instead of being treated with gratitude and consideration by its beneficiary.... The tail not only wagged the dog, it also barked, while for many years the dog remained silent and embarrassed."

That was the scene in January 1992, as reported by Leon Hadar in *Middle East Policy* ("The 'Special Relationship': Israel Decides Its Future").

Plus ça change . . .

After Vice President Joseph Biden returned from his visit to Israel in March, Israel's ambassador in Washington, Michael Oren, confided to his colleagues that the two countries' relations were in "the worst crisis in 35 years."

Biden started that visit by declaring that America's commitment to Israel was "unshakable," that "there is absolutely no space between the United States and Israel in terms of Israel's security—none." Only hours later the Israeli government announced a plan to build 1,600 new apartments for Jews in the Ramat Shlomo district of East Jerusalem.

The move humiliated Biden and infuriated Palestinians, who see East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, and whose leaders had only recently agreed—at Biden's urging and arm-twisting—to resume indirect talks with Israel. Either it was a "gaffe" (as Israel claimed) or a deliberate attempt to present the United States with a *fait accompli* and assert Israel's right to build in the area she annexed in 1967, an area she does not regard as "occupied territory."

Biden condemned the announcement, and on March 12 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton kept Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the phone for 45 minutes expressing her displeasure. (Love him or hate him, you have to sympathize with "Bibi" on this one.) In a speech to AIPAC on March 22, Clinton said that continued expansion of Jewish settlements undermined mutual trust and endangered the putative peace process.

The announcement that Netanyahu would meet President Obama at the White House on March 23 was widely seen as a sign that Washington was prepared to defuse the crisis and expected the Israeli prime minister to make a conciliatory gesture in return. This was not to be: Just hours before the meeting came another Israeli announcement that new homes for Jews would be built in East Jerusalem, this time in the Sheikh Jarrah district. No "gaffe" this time.

The two rounds of talks lasted 90 minutes and ended without a statement, without a photo op, and without an agreement on the construction moratorium. The United States and Israel have a "strong relationship," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said blandly the following day, without disclosing any details. "There are areas of agreement, there are areas of disagreement..." One area of disagreement, my usually reliable sources say, concerned Netanyahu's attempt to shift the focus of the talks to Iran and her nuclear program. Obama accepted that the program is a problem but refused to be sidetracked. It was the chilliest U.S.-Israeli summit in a generation.

At home, taking a hard line on Jerusalem—"Jerusalem is not a settlement; it's our capital," Netanyahu says—is supported by a majority of Israelis, including those who favor trading land for peace in the West Bank. Humiliating an American president widely perceived as Muslim-friendly and ambivalent on Israel is no less popular: According to a *Haaretz* poll (March 23), a large majority of Israelis believes Netanyahu was not deliberately causing a crisis in relations with Washington. On both fronts, he will also score points with the hard-liners in his fragile coalition government.

Abroad, Netanyahu is making it clear that he is not committed to the two-state solution and that the status of Jerusalem is to him nonnegotiable. Ominously for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, before the Biden visit Netanyahu had obtained an agreement from the United States that assurances offered by his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, would no longer be regarded as the platform for future talks. Those assurances had been based on the principle of a two-state solution. Netanyahu may speak about the future of the occupied Palestinian territories, but his Likud Party and (especially) his coalition partners do not accept that they are either "Palestinian" or "occupied." If the proximity talks are canceled, or (more likely) initiated but then hopelessly stalled, Netanyahu expects Obama's already low regional credibility to sink even further. He hopes that in November his GOP friends will regain Congress and that, two years from now, the President will be successfully challenged by someone whose middle name is not Hussein.

Back in 1991, George H.W. Bush told Israel that he would not provide ten billion dollars in loan guarantees unless there was a moratorium on settlements. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir shrugged and effectively told the President to send the money and mind his own business. The following year he got the money, and Bush *père* lost the election. *Plus ça change*, indeed.

—Srdja Trifkovic

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Texas Rebellion

YOU MUST HAVE NOTICED that the National Education Association, the *New York Times*, ABC, NBC, CBS, left-wing bloggers, and even the *Dallas Morning News* went ape in March over the outcome of textbook deliberations in Texas. It seems that the state board of education, dominated by political and social conservatives, prescribed changes in model curricula developed by a committee of teachers and scholars that is dominated by political and social liberals.

The shock, the raw anger, the outrage over the board's intervention suggest the deeper question that troubles Texas and, for that matter, the rest of America: To whom do our public schools belong? The people of Texas have established a school system, and they support it with their tax dollars. Having paid the bills, do they have the right to say what is taught in their own schools? Or must they surrender that right to a group of "experts" who are presumed to know more about what children should believe than parents and other ordinary citizens? That question is complicated by the fact that today we are in the midst of a polarizing "culture war" that makes rational dialogue on many issues all but impossible.

In setting up their unique curricula-adoption system, Texas answers that question. It has established a committee of experts to construct model curricula for math, history, social studies, and other subjects. Then the state board—which is elected by the people—reviews each curriculum and may or may not mandate changes. In effect, the experts have the first crack at the problem, but the elected representatives of the people have the last word.

The March meetings were held to develop guidelines for publishers to follow in preparing textbooks. In May they will come back with finished products for a final decision by the board. Texas is the only state that buys books for over 8,300 schools, and when the board submits its order, it writes checks that total an estimated $600 million. In addition, over the years, Texas-approved materials have been widely adopted by school districts in other states, a fact that has made publishers doubly interested in the Texas adoption process. The possibility of such megabucks provides a sufficient incentive for their reps to listen carefully to what the board said in March.

Needless to say, the intervention of the board and these brutal economic facts have angered the politically correct crowd, not only because the experts believe the values they promote are uniquely true, but because they believe those who disagree with them are evil.

The left has complained bitterly about the mere mention of conservative activists and groups such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Newt Gingrich's Contract With America, and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. The board's majority recommended these additions to offset a plethora of references to leaders and organizations of the left. Agree with them or not, these three conservatives have made an enormous impact on the politics of contemporary America.

The board also mandated the inclusion of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, both Nobel laureates in economics. Hayek and Friedman are known as advocates of a free-market economy. Before the board's recommendation, students only learned about Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, and Adam Smith. Again, the board was insisting on balance, something their opponents clearly held in contempt.

Left-leaning board members also wanted to replace the traditional B.C. and A.D. with B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era). The majority voted to keep the older abbreviations, perhaps because "Common Era" is a largely meaningless phrase invented by ideologues who regard the intrusion of Jesus into world history as a calamity better ignored.

In the same spirit, the experts had replaced Christmas with Diwali—a Hindu festival celebrating, among other things, the homecoming of Rama. (The United States is 0.4 percent Hindu.) The board restored Christmas.

None of these additions or subtractions required experience in the classroom or an esoteric expertise. It didn't take an Ed.D. to stack a textbook with "progressive" heroes and heroines any more than it took a 10-5 majority to include a few conservative icons. All it took in both cases were strongly held opinions.

Of course, with their newly acquired power, the members of the conservative board went beyond the bounds of fair play when they refused to highlight a handful of Mexicans who stood with Bowie and Travis in defense of the Alamo. One pre-

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sumes they were just as dead as the white folks when the smoke cleared.

And if, as charged, contemporary artist Santa Barraza was removed from a textbook because one of her paintings featured bare breasts, then the spirit of Savonarola rides the range, since the breasts in her extremely primitive portraits look more like tractor tires than erotica.

Few conservatives want textbooks filled with churchy platitudes. History is too complex, too exasperatingly human to jump through doctrinal hoops. But the secularist censorship of the nation's religious past needs to have its rear end paddled. That's what was happening down in Texas. Let's hope the paddling doesn't get out of hand.

—*Tom Landess*

Dominion Mosque

If the definition of a liberal is a person who won't take his own side in a fight, Adam Ebbin and Kaye Kory, Democrats who represent Virginia's 49th and 38th districts in the commonwealth's House of Delegates, should have their pictures next to the word in Webster's.

Ebbin, a homosexual Jew, invited Johari Abdul-Malik, a Muslim cleric, to deliver the opening prayer at the state General Assembly on March 11. Kory, a white woman, cosponsored the invitation. Many of Abdul-Malik's coreligionists, if not Abdul-Malik himself, would like to see Ebbin's head severed with a scimitar. And they would want Kory locked up at home, draped head-to-toe in a suffocating burqa. Apparently, neither gets it.

For those who don't follow the activities of Muslims in what is now called Northern Virginiastan, Abdul-Malik hails from the Dar Al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia. Dar Al-Hijrah is known as the "9/11 mosque," because two of the September 11 hijackers worshiped there. So did Maj. Nidal Hasan, the Muslim "psychiatrist" who murdered 13 people at Fort Hood in November.

For his part, Abdul-Malik defended Dar Al-Hijrah congregant Ahmed Omar Abu Ali, the man sentenced to life in prison for plotting to assassinate President George W. Bush. When the authorities collared Abu Ali, Abdul-Malik unbosomed the typical hysterics for the *New York Times*: "Our whole community is under siege. They don't see this as a case of criminality. They see it as a civil rights case. As a frontal attack on their community."

Abdul-Malik continued the caterwauling for Ali Al-Timimi, who was sentenced to life in prison in 2003 for inciting *jihad* against the U.S. government. The problem? Al-Timimi and his pals "have discovered they are not free to speak their minds. And if our opinions are out of vogue in the current climate, we feel we are all at risk."

Paul Sperry, author of *Infiltration: How Muslim Spies and Subversives Have Penetrated Washington* (in which Dar Al-Hijrah is prominently featured) has reported that Abdul-Malik has said that sabotage is acceptable and that Islam will reign supreme in the United States.

Citing Abdul-Malik's radicalism, opponents tried to keep him from praying at the General Assembly. Jim Lafferty, head of the Virginia Anti-Shariah Task Force, held a press conference the day of the prayer. He urged members of the General Assembly either to rescind the invitation or to boycott the prayer. Said Lafferty, "This lends an aura of respectability to someone who doesn't deserve it. This man has cheered on people who want to kill the United States president."

Lafferty and others were ignored and accused of the usual. Ebbin contributed to the ignorance: "I haven't seen any substantiated reason to ask him not to come." That left the accusation to the imam himself. Reported the *Roanoke Times*: "'[R]acism still lives in the Old Dominion . . . But at the same time, there's a new Dominion. That's what we're going to show people.'" Some of us liked the Old Dominion, but in any event no one protested Abdul-Malik, whose real name is Winslow Seale, because he is black. They protested because he is a Muslim who defends terrorists.

So Abdul-Malik burbled his prayer to the "Divine and Creative force Known by many names":

> Let our legacy past
> Propel us to enlightened future
> Give us the strength
> to go beyond tolerance to
> understanding
> Where there is hate
> Let us show love
> Where there is fear
> Let us find faith

Virginia's General Assembly is the oldest continuously operating elected legislature in the western hemisphere. As Lafferty noted on the Virginia conservatives page of *TCUNation.com*, "The State Capitol in Richmond is one of the most historic buildings in America. It has echoed with the debates over the Revolutionary War and the War Between the States. Patrick Henry delivered his famous speech there—'Give me liberty or give me death!' Abdul-Malik has the latter in mind for free Americans."

Mr. Lafferty hasn't got the message: He now lives in the New Dominion.

—*R. Cort Kirkwood*

Persecuting Ann

Ann Coulter did not enjoy her stay in the land of Dudley Do-Right. "Since arriving in Canada," she wrote on her website on March 24, "I've been accused of thought crimes, threatened with criminal prosecution for speeches I hadn't yet given, and denounced on the floor of the Parliament (which was nice because that one

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was on my 'bucket list')."

A few days before Coulter's scheduled appearance at the University of Ottawa, where she had been invited to speak by the university's Campus Conservatives, university vice-president academic and provost François Houle wrote a letter to "inform . . . or perhaps remind" the conservative vixen that Canada has laws that "delineate freedom of expression." Any lectures that promoted "hatred" against a particular group would be against Canadian law, and violation "could in fact lead to criminal charges."

Houle's threat was leaked to the media, and by the evening of March 23, when the talk was scheduled to take place, liberal students had worked themselves into an uproar. Before Coulter was even on the scene, a number of them had gathered outside the building in protest. According to Coulter, there was yelling, throwing of tables, and blocking of entryways, before someone finally pulled the fire alarm. The talk was canceled, allegedly over concerns for Coulter's safety. Coulter asserts that the police called her bodyguard and informed him of the cancellation.

The university's official statement reads a bit differently: "Last night, the organizers themselves decided at 7:50 p.m. to cancel the event and so informed the University's Protection Services staff on site. At that time, a crowd of about one thousand people had peacefully gathered at Marion Hall." Most other news sources agree that it was Coulter and her organizers, not the university, who canceled her lecture.

As for the threat of violence, video footage of students present at the building before the cancellation does show a number of shouting, sign-waving protestors. So perhaps the university's idea of what constitutes a "peacefully gathered" crowd is open to debate.

Coulter says she intends to file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Houle's letter, she argues, incited hatred toward her.

The letter and its implied threat were certainly a political move—Houle's attempt at shielding the University of Ottawa from the embarrassment of having Ann Coulter speak within its august walls. Both Coulter and Ezra Levant, the Canadian conservative activist who was to introduce Coulter and who ran afoul of the Human Rights Commission when he reprinted the Danish cartoons of Muhammad, stated that after the release of the letter the university recommended that Coulter's sponsors spend another thousand dollars or so on security at the event. Whether or not he intended to stir up the student body, Houle seems to have accomplished just that. But the hate-speech laws protect only "identifiable groups"—minorities, Muslims, women. Coulter would have to prove that Houle's purpose had been to provoke "hatred" against her because of her membership in some group, and conservatives aren't on the list of people whose "human rights" Canada is terribly worried about protecting.

By resorting to typical leftist threats of violence and censure against non-p.c. views, Houle and the University of Ottawa forced the cancellation and gave Ann Coulter some fabulous publicity. Because she tends to make catty remarks about Muslims and other favorites of the left, the university did its best to keep her from speaking, which gave her more media coverage to make catty remarks about Muslims and other favorites of the left—and University of Ottawa officials and students.

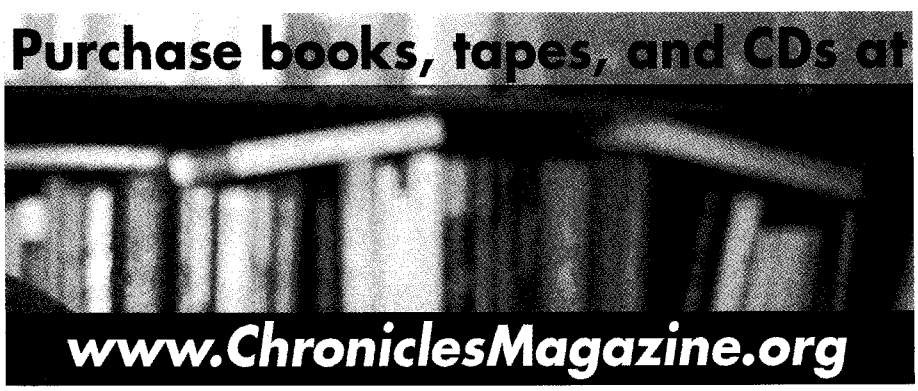
Such is the level to which political "debate" has fallen. Ann Coulter has become a conservative celebrity because she wears short skirts, tosses her long blond hair, and makes snippy comments. This is the type of "conservative" the right has chosen to glorify. She's a perfect target for the left, which gets its kicks out of rioting, threatening, and censuring. It's bread and circuses for the American consumer of political drama, and nothing more.

—Nicole M. Kooistra

Obiter Dicta

Our poet this month is **Jon Dressel**, Director Emeritus of both the American Studies Programme and the Graduate Programme in Creative Writing at Trinity College of the University of Wales. His poems have won prizes in major poetry competitions in both the United States and Great Britain, and his six collections of poetry include *Hard Love and a Country* (Christopher Davies), *Out of Wales* (Alun Books), *The Road to Shiloh* and *Ribbons of Steel* (Gomer Press).

The art on the cover and pages 12 and 15 is provided by our interior artist, **George McCartney, Jr.** Mr. McCartney studied at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and received a bachelor's of art from the State University of New York at Geneseo. Since 1997, he has worked in various media in the fields of illustration, graphic design, and textiles. George resides in North Carolina with his wife, Kristin, and their children.



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Save the Children

Modern Americans are going to live forever. We must believe that; otherwise we would not rise up in spontaneous outrage whenever a stuck accelerator causes a car to crash or a surgical procedure goes awry. Science and technology have made our world not only foolproof but death-proof, or at least they would have, were it not for unscrupulous manufacturers and diabolical white males who roam the world seeking the ruin of bodies. Every natural disaster, human error, or manifestation of Original Sin is an occasion not just for an exercise in national breast-beating but for some piece of sweeping legislation that will eliminate risk or eradicate evil.

We are especially prone to legislative hysteria when children are involved. If a child chokes to death on a hot dog, the pediatricians of America want wieners to be classified as lethal weapons, and if a crackhead mother on welfare finally kills the baby she has been tormenting for months, we do not blame crack dealers or welfare or the degraded morality of urban African-Americans. No, we pass laws that strip normal parents of their traditional rights, beef up the budgets of child-protection agencies, and demand parenting classes for all prospective fathers and mothers—anything, in other words, except to confront the real issue, which is the nightmare we have created by paying people not to work and by pretending that all people in every culture are basically the same. If anything is to be banned in America, it should be the liberals who have destroyed so many lives with the stupid programs that enrich worthless drones in counseling and sociology at the expense of everyone else—and that was before the passage of President Obama's healthcare bill.

For people allergic to leftist sentimentality, these past few months have been difficult. When the newsreaders were not chattering about the hot dog's threat to world peace or touting the glories of socialized medicine, they were showing their viewers pictures of earthquake victims in Haiti and Chile, polio victims in Africa, the violence Michael Jackson's children are being exposed to, or (and this is my favorite) the humanitarian award the United Nations has given "Shakira"—a Colombian pop star, apparently, who has some strange aversion to being fully clad. At the awards ceremony in Switzerland, she was described as a "true ambassador for children and young people, for quality education and social justice." When some years ago I coined the phrase "pornography of compassion," I did not realize how literally correct I was.

The child-savers have been afflicting the world at least since the beginning of the 20th century, when a conspiracy of WASP do-gooders with time on their hands succeeded in getting legislation passed to "protect" children—largely immigrant children—from parents who put them to work, neglected their education, inflicted corporal punishment, or refused to imbue them with the gospel of Horatio Alger and Carrie Nation. In reading hundreds of pages of the bilge written by these people, including Rockford College's own Jane Addams, I almost never ran across an acknowledgment of the harsh reality that even substandard parents will probably take better care of their children than the most high-minded altruist who wants to rear other people's children.

Even the madman Rousseau believed that an educated father makes a better teacher than the best of tutors, because the father cares more about his children than someone who gets paid to teach them. This is far more true today, when the only possible justification for public education is that it is guaranteed to stunt the mental growth of children and corrupt their character. Years ago, I knew a Jehovah's Witness who had left high school to join the Navy. He was not exactly stupid, but about as ignorant as a man can be who only knows what he reads in the papers or sees on the network news. He and his equally ignorant wife decided, on moral grounds, that they had to homeschool their child, and after two years of this doomed experiment, their kid, whom nature had programmed to be decidedly below average, was two years above the national average on reading and mathematics.

Any normal couple will do a better job rearing their children than someone who is paid to take on this wearisome task. I am not speaking now of sex offenders, sadists, and drug addicts, only of the carefree and sometimes slipshod methods of the poor Irish, Italian, and Polish families who entered the United States a hundred years ago or the Mexicans who are currently overwhelming our welfare and criminal-justice systems. To take an extreme example, do we really know that children will grow up into better human beings if they are taken away from a mud hut in

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Somalia and reared in an upper-middle-class suburb of Los Angeles? Sir Peter Bauer once sagely observed that the premise of humanitarian aid is that people in rich countries are happier than people in poor countries. If that were so, then why are so many Americans so manifestly unhappy? Why is there so much depression and suicide here? Why do so many affluent women addle their brains with mood-altering poisons?

The answer I usually receive is that people in poor countries are so busy scratching out a living that they don't have the time or energy to be depressed. Well, chalk up a point for poverty and hard work. If we cut off all aid to the indolent poor in this country, the gangbangers would either starve or pick up a shovel. "Root, hog, or die" is a true expression that works on many levels.

When we begin to worry about things like education and the "quality of life," we have already fallen into the sentimentalist trap. Listen to this egregious nonsense from the Save the Children Foundation:

> Our mission is to create lasting, positive change in the lives of children in need in the U.S. and around the world.
>
> Our priorities are to ensure that children in need grow up **protected and safe, educated, healthy and well-nourished, and able to thrive in economically secure households**.

I suppose the boldface letters tell us that they really really care about education, nourishment, and economic security.

What this sort of thinking leads to was on display recently when a group of Southern Baptists were caught smuggling children out of Haiti. Whether or not the parents received any money, whether or not the child-savers really had an orphanage, whether or not they were acting even before the earthquake is of little interest to me. What is interesting is the moral arrogance of the Americans who assume, first, that the kids will be better off in a society that is committed to destroying whatever human norms may still exist even in Haiti; and second, that it is their right to impose Third World children with who knows what sort of native abilities and disabilities ultimately on the people of the United States.

Oh, but Haiti is such a poor and violent country. Don't we have a duty to rescue Haitian children? But why is Haiti such a poor country and America so rich? Could it possibly be that it is because America is populated by Americans and Haiti by Haitians?

Not if you believe the other kind of leftists, capitalist libertarians like Douglas Casey, who recently opined that if Haiti were given the same dose of free-market economics that Friedman and his boys injected into Chile, Haiti could be another Hong Kong—as if anyone in his right mind could ever want to live in Hong Kong. Obviously, hard work and free enterprise are good things, but if 200 years of Haitian independence has only produced an immense violent slum run by witch doctors, it is just a little naive to expect that a mechanical fix will create an economic and moral paradise. It would be nice to have just one example in which such remedies have worked with people who were neither European nor Asian.

I have been no closer to Haiti than the pages of Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, which is too close for my comfort, but I have no reason to doubt that if left to their own devices they might find leaders and institutions with which they could make a better life for themselves. It might not be the life I want, but, then, I do not know that other people actually want any part of my life or our life.

Human happiness is not a one-size-fits-all garment, and it is xenophobic to suppose that it is. This is what liberal philosophers are so fond of gabbling about—that the purpose of a liberal state is to make it possible for individuals to pursue their own life plans. Why does it always turn out that it has to be the life plan drawn up by a liberal philosopher, whether a leftist like Professor Rawls or a quondam libertarian like Professor Nozick? Whey can't they just mind their own business and leave other people to mind theirs?

If we can once realize that it is best to leave Haiti and Somalia alone, then we might begin to understand that we should also leave other people's families alone. What is the alternative? If government officials and social workers have to tell parents when and where and how their children go to school, what sort of food they eat and TV they watch, what sort of sex education they receive, then not only those lawmakers and social workers but also the voters who give them power have to assume complete responsibility for the outcomes.

We have to quit letting them—and ourselves—off the hook with the comforting language of unintended consequences. If I were to fire off a few rounds into a daycare center, I might have had no intention of killing any particular child, but when a child is dead, I am held responsible. But when government programs ruin the lives of millions of children, no one, it seems, is to be held accountable. It is American governments and their employees, the voters who put the legislators in office and the taxpayers who pay the bills—it is we, in other words, who are responsible. ◆

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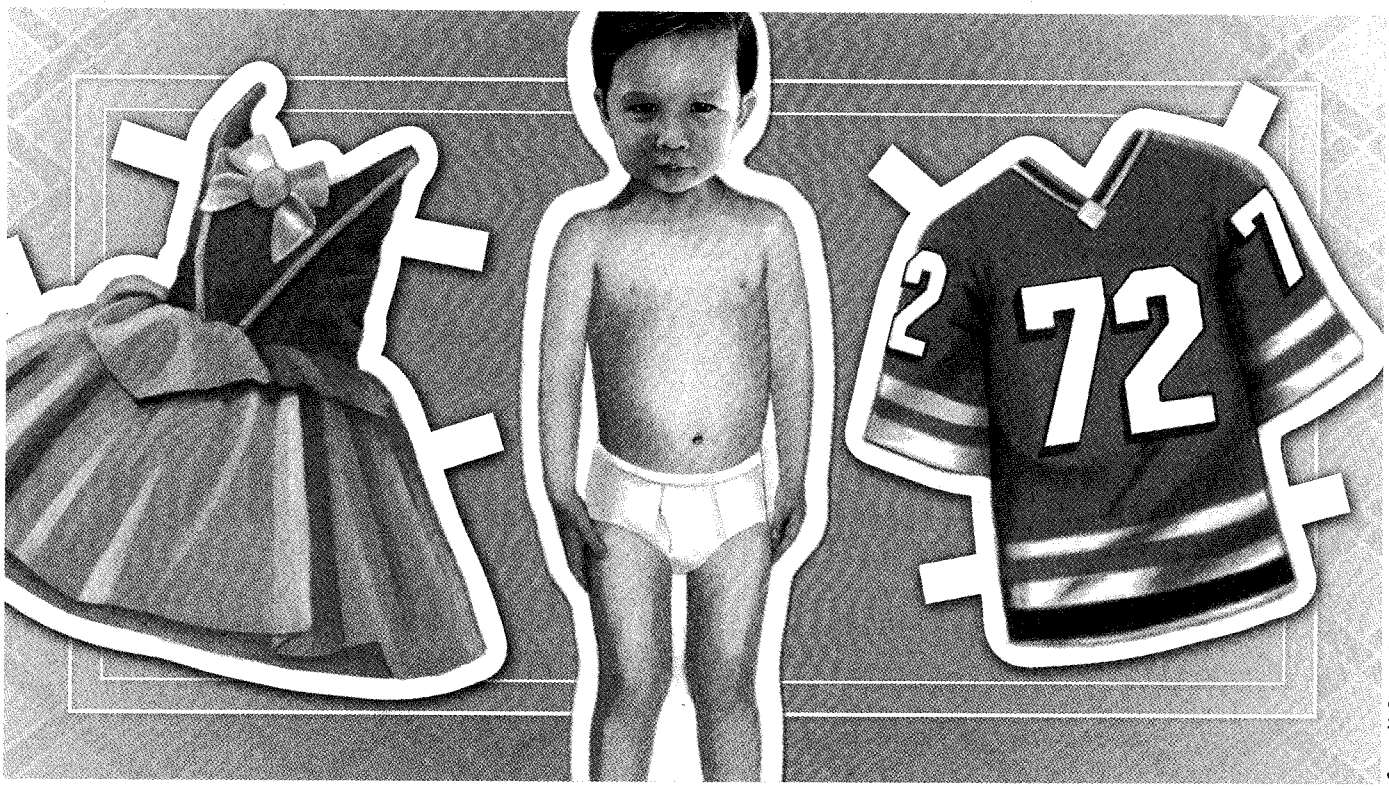

George McCartney, Jr.

Adopting Indecency

by William Murchison

A SENTENCE from a recent *New York Times Magazine* profile clings to the mind, like lint. The profile is of Scott Brown, whose sudden ascent to the U.S. Senate fascinated America a few months back. In 2001, the story relates, when a colleague of Brown's, a lesbian state senator in Massachusetts, "announced that she and her partner had decided to have children, [Brown] said that such an arrangement was 'not normal.' (He later apologized.)"

Two points shriek for attention: Brown's deployment of the word *normal* in a context—the moral/philosophical—in which it is nearly out of use these days, and his abandonment of the term once the room temperature soared too high.

It's not normal anymore to talk about normal. Yet, in so speaking, Scott Brown was 1,000 percent right. It really, truly, honestly is not normal for two people of the same sex to undertake the vital and holy estate of parenthood. That Informed Opinion brought him around to an apology shows just how tough things have become for the acceptance and living out of propositions once deemed clear, plain, and unassailable.

Growing acceptance of the right of "gays" and lesbians to adopt children is great stuff, we read and hear. Adopting reinforces, supposedly, the relationships of homosexual couples: showcasing their innate caringness, not to mention their basic human abilities. It integrates into structured family life children lacking families and homes of any kind, loving and concerned or abusive and violent. What's not to like?

Consider another *New York Times* story from around the time of Senator Brown's electoral victory. New Jersey's senate had voted against allowing same-sex "marriage." The *Times* noted the active role that children being raised by homosexuals were playing in the campaign for such unions: the New Jersey ten-year-old, for instance, who said, "It doesn't bother me to tell kids my parents are gay. It does bother me to say they aren't married. It makes me feel that our family is less than their family."

Scott Brown clearly wouldn't say it, but someone must:

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Whatever the large claims made for homosexual adoption, whatever the benefits that accrue to adopted children freed from less-than-good circumstances, the "gay family" is inherently less than the traditional two-parent family. It's a fact of life, even in an age notably careless with facts it finds disagreeable.

The *Times* quotes a UCLA law-school researcher as reporting that, in 2008, some 116,000 same-sex couples were bringing up a quarter of a million children under 18. What Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute calls "a radical revision of the traditional relationship between parents and children" is coming at us down the track—a revision "whose consequences no one can predict." Maybe not "predict," but fret about all the same.

Not the least consequence, to my way of thinking, is rhetorical dissonance. Take, in the second *New York Times* story cited, the declaration of 21-year-old Chiah Connolly-Ingram, in reference to California's statewide ban on "gay marriage," enacted by referendum in November 2008. She begins: "As the daughter of lesbian moms . . . "

One child, two moms? Not hardly, as we say in the South. One is all you get in life, for good biological reasons. Miss Connolly-Ingram is redefining to her own satisfaction the institutions of parenthood and marriage, never mind what civilization and religion might say and believe to the contrary. Rhetorical dissonance can be hard on the eardrums, but it has its purposes. To redefine is to give new shape to something. The idea with "gay marriage" and adoption is to establish equivalence with the traditional forms, if not to deform the forms entirely: to make personal choice instrumental in the definition.

"There is no ideal family form anymore," says Lisa Bennett of the Human Rights Campaign, which agitates on behalf of gay rights. "There are many forms of family." There are? Then Miss Connolly-Ingram's form is just as good, just as valid, just as worthwhile as, say, Dr. James Dobson's—possibly better, by a little bit anyway, than Sen. John Edwards'. From this acknowledgement—if one chooses to go that way—large implications flow. For instance, childbirth and rearing move ineluctably outside the husband-wife circle. Anybody can do it—why not?

Artificial insemination (someone should write a thesis sometime on the ghastliness of the term) can provide any lesbian with a baby. Indeed, according to the Urban Institute, more than one in three lesbians has given birth. An equally efficacious route to parenthood is adoption, which various states, according to Bennett, now see "as a fine thing" for gays and lesbians. "Some," she adds, "have explicit, welcoming language" in their policies.

The great majority of states do not specifically prohibit homosexual adoption. For one thing, the large and growing population of abused or abandoned children needs housing and feeding. Gay and lesbian couples, according to Bennett, "are willing to take children [whom] others are not." So pragmatism plays its own role—along with rights ideology—in the abandonment of supposedly rocklike family norms.

As we know, pragmatism and ideology, once they get in high gear, sweep past roadblocks hewn from experience, common sense, and, shall we say, cosmic understanding. The American Psychological Association archly declares, "[T]here is no reliable evidence that homosexual orientation per se impairs psychological functioning. Second, beliefs that lesbian and gay adults are not fit parents have no empirical foundation."

Well, pardon us as a culture for cleaving all these years to the assumption that, because biology pointed rather clearly to the complementarity of men and women, there must be something to the assumption that nature (yea, even Nature's God) fixed things up in this particular way.

The matter, to be sure, goes beyond the merely physical. Heather Mac Donald (no evangelical Bible-walloper she) notes that the "institutionalized severing of biology from parenthood affirms a growing trend" of "men abandoning their biological children. Too many men now act like sperm donors: they conceive children then largely disappear, becoming at best intermittent presences in their children's lives." Particularly is this true, she says, among blacks, who pay for it in the coin of social breakdown and educational failure.

Mac Donald notes, as do many other writers on the subject, that the complementarity of men and women has to do with more than biology. If maleness and femaleness are distinct attributes, however friendly to each other, the child needs exposure to both in order to function in the real world, as opposed to one governed by ideology. Mothers nurture, fathers teach—to borrow Mac Donald's wonderfully antique phrase—the "manly virtues."

OK, OK, anyone can point to plenty of instances in which men nurture very nicely and women would as soon slap you silly as look at you. Such instances no more than reinforce our old understandings of the normal. If the American Psychological Association has "empirical" evidence to show a man and a woman are the same commodity (one just smells better than the other), might it be pleased to come forward and elucidate?

A subsurface consideration, on account of its unac-

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ceptability in politically correct forums, is that of potential confusion in children reared by people of the same sex—the capacity for acclimating them, and others outside their immediate circle, to marital and parenting arrangements that civilization has heretofore declared at odds with its purposes and understandings.

The gay-parenting vogue is part and parcel of the 50-year recoil from the old standards and decencies we came for odd reasons to find boring or irrelevant.

Oh boy, can I hear it. The friends of homosexual adoption rejoin that it is about love and care and concern. They relate—with justification—horror stories concerning many of the children whom homosexual couples have scooped up from the child-welfare system, or worse. We hear as well that same-sex couples aren't behindhand at all in the teaching of values and virtues; that they show at least as much love and care and concern as many heteros one probably knows. I am willing to grant most such expostulations and with pleasure to affirm that gays and lesbians as a category may know at least as much about honesty, prudence, dignity, temperance, justice, fortitude, and so on as do heterosexuals as a category.

That is not, of course, the end of the matter. Hard and faithfully as they might try, homosexual couples cannot model the virtues and opportunities inherent in a mom-and-dad-headed family. Only Mom and Dad can do that. That they do not do it nearly as often as they promised to at the altar of God, or with the dedication of their forebears, in no way impeaches the conviction that such families are the only kind that makes sense—and that society should actively encourage them, not least by discouraging imitations. Society does not encourage the formation of traditional families by saying to the citizenry, oh, you know, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, different strokes for different folks, *etc.*

There is just the one stroke worth applying here, and it is the traditional family. The assault on the moral order has gone far indeed when so basic a proposition can raise more than a few eyebrows, and those largely in Ivy League dorms. Scott Brown was right: The particular adoption he disparaged, involving a pair of lesbians and a small child, was not normal. It failed, as he saw, to coincide with the great norms laid down in millennia past by prophets and priests and thinkers wiser even than the board of the American Psychological Association.

ONE THING a society has to do is repopulate—a task made all the harder, at least in the West, by the social and political tolerance presently accorded abortion on demand. Repopulation is the service that men and women, acting in literal conjunction, provide. It keeps life moving forward: new generations raised up, essential tasks taken in hand, new ideas hatched and developed.

Is a girl raised by two women, or a boy brought up by two men, likely to evaluate parenthood with the eagerness, the expectation, of a teen who sees, in Mom and Dad, an appealing pattern for the future? It simply doesn't stand to reason that downgrading heterosexuality as the civilized norm is going to encourage, or even maintain, the desire to march boldly into the future, doing what parents have always done. Yes, and still do, to the credit of the majority—namely, make new life; nurture and protect that life; adorn it with understanding; then, at last, endow it with a sense of responsibility for what comes next.

The tenor of life since the 60's has been one of unabashed self-indulgence. We are to suppose that downgrading traditional marriage and parenthood will discourage illegitimacy, quick divorce, child abuse, and the age's other expressions of self-regard? Not bloody likely, as Eliza Doolittle might put it.

The gay-parenting vogue is part and parcel of the 50-year recoil from the old standards and decencies we came for odd reasons to find boring or irrelevant. Consequences? We're not supposed to care for such. It's all in the eye of the beholder, this consequences stuff. Such a beholder, perhaps, as the seven-year-old girl in Virginia over whom her lesbian birth mother and the mother's ex-partner have been contending in court since the ex-partner converted to evangelical Christianity and procured a legal end to the civil union. It hurts the head to say these things, in part on account of their complexity—mostly because of the hurts and injuries that come inevitably when ordinary people twist rules and norms in the service of decidedly non-ordinary purposes.

The old priests and thinkers knew what they were doing when they set the moral tone of the old life—one poorly adapted to novelty and emotional trickery, and all the lovelier for it, all the more powerful and enduring.

William Murchison is a corresponding editor for Chronicles *and the author of* Mortal Follies: Episcopalians and the Crisis of Mainline Christianity.

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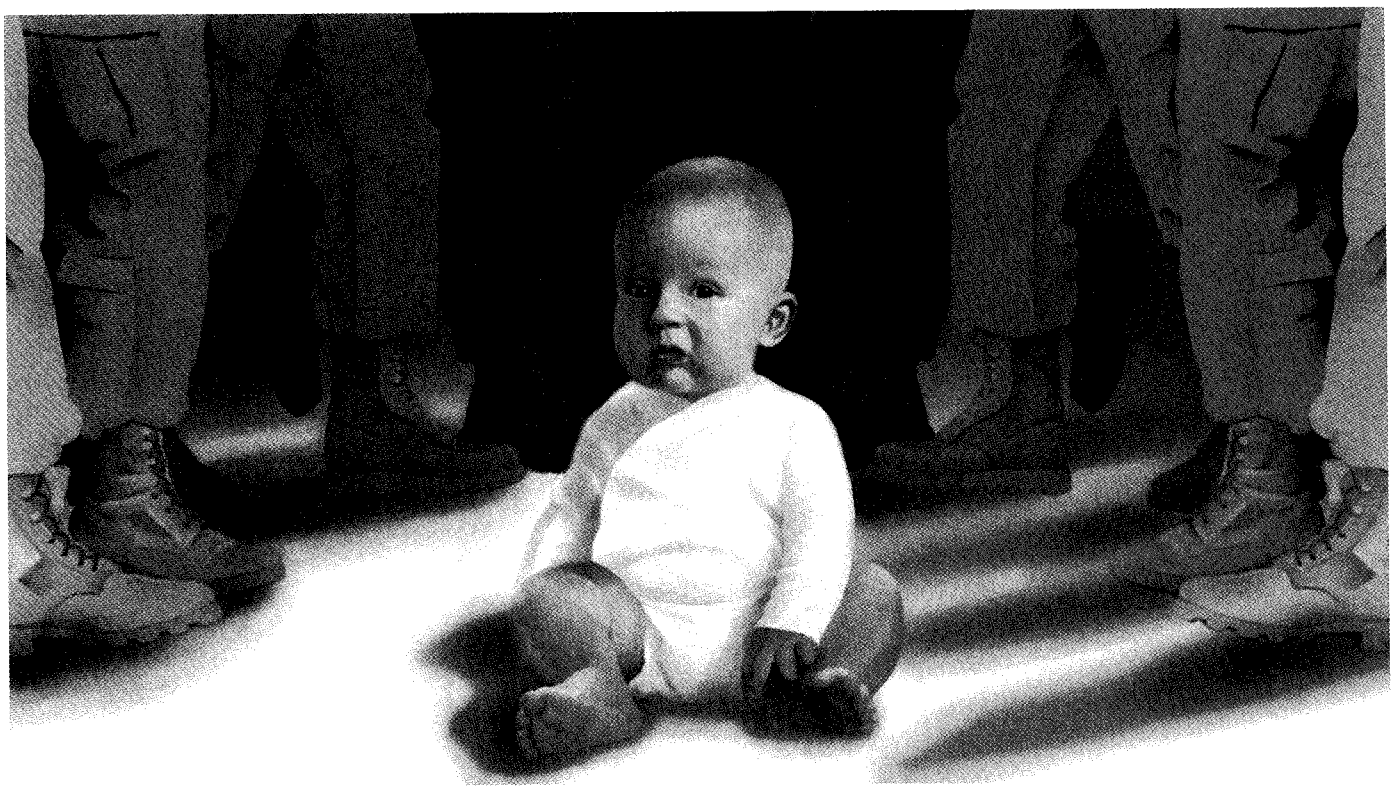

George McCartney, Jr.

For the Children

by Scott P. Richert

"I FIGURED IF HE WAS THERE, I'd make sure he wasn't there [again]," Harlan Drake, a 33-year-old truck driver, told Det. Sgt. Scott Shenk of the Shiawassee County Sheriff's Department. But on the morning of September 11, 2009, James Pouillon was there, sitting across the street from Owosso High School as he had on so many other mornings. And so Harlan Drake stopped his car, pulled a .45 out of a bag, carefully took aim, and shot Pouillon. "He was still moving so I shot him one more time. I aimed under the ribcage going up toward the heart."

Alana Beamish, who had just dropped her son off at school, attempted to save Pouillon's life, but it was too late. The 63-year-old died on the ground.

Drake murdered another man, Mike Fuoss, that day, and went in search of a third, James Howe, intending to kill him, too. Caught a few hours later, Drake told Detective Sergeant Shenk that "he was going to make our job very easy." He confessed to both murders, and from then until his trial ended in a guilty verdict on March 11, Harlan Drake expressed no remorse.

Mike Fuoss's name was little more than a footnote in most media coverage of that fateful day in Owosso, Michigan. It was the murder of Pouillon that captured the nation's attention. As Drake told Detective Sergeant Shenk, "I asked [Pouillon] over the years not to do that in front of the kids. A little kid shouldn't have to look at that."

Was Pouillon a pervert, an exhibitionist? No: Through his decades-long stakeout at Owosso High School and numerous other places throughout the city and county, Pouillon intended not to victimize children but to save them from the horrors of abortion. Harlan Drake claimed that he had no problem with that message; it was the medium that Pouillon used that convinced Drake to put an end to Pouillon's life: "I'm not against anti-abortion. I'm against showing little kids those pictures."

Those pictures were three- and four-foot-high graphic photographs of bloodied, dismembered unborn children—the "product" of abortions. Drake wasn't the only resident

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of Owosso who objected to Pouillon's tactics. In a community that is largely pro-life, Pouillon found few defenders. Why? Because, as the Associated Press reported on February 23, Pouillon "was everywhere—the farmers market, City Hall, the county courthouse, football games—with verbal taunts that were as shocking as his signs."

Political measures can be undone, but every child whom we save becomes a living witness—an icon—of the love of God and a testimony that we Christians live what we preach.

As Pouillon's barber told the AP, "I had no problem with his message. He was just overboard with it. He knew how to push buttons on people, but Jim didn't deserve to be executed on the sidewalk." A local woman interviewed by the AP went even further: "I don't agree with someone taking someone's life . . . But I don't miss the man on the corner or his foul mouth. He would chase you, call you names. He was evil. His pictures were so gross."

One does not have to draw a moral equivalence between murder and a pro-life protest, no matter how unsettling the tactics used, to see a disturbing parallel between the two men. Their shared conviction that extreme measures are justified "for the sake of the children" left one man dead and the other in prison for life. But what, in the end, did either man accomplish?

Those of us who oppose abortion and support pro-life measures need not give Harlan Drake a second thought, except perhaps to utter a prayer for his conversion. But can we learn any lessons from James Pouillon's tragic end?

THE IMAGES that Pouillon used are being increasingly adopted by pro-lifers—a sign, perhaps, of desperation, as the years since *Roe* v. *Wade* continue to tick by, with only minor and occasional declines in the number of abortions in the United States, from 1.4 million to 1.2 million per year, every year, for over 37 years.

Thus the excitement in the pro-life movement in early October 2009 when the *New York Times* published an article on its *Lens* blog by reporter Damien Cave, who had covered the murder of Pouillon and attended his memorial service in Owosso. "Behind the Scenes: Picturing Fetal Remains" is the first serious and extended examination in the mainstream media of the use of such images in pro-life protests.

Cave interviewed Monica Migliorino Miller, the director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society and a theology professor at Madonna University, a Franciscan school in Livonia, Michigan. Mrs. Miller estimates that half of the images of aborted children that are used in pro-life protests are pictures that she took, starting in 1987.

What is most interesting about Mrs. Miller's story is her understanding of what she hoped to accomplish. From the beginning, she told Mr. Cave, her purpose was "journalistic": "We felt it was very important to make a record of the reality of abortion."

Yet "Over time," Cave writes,

> her views on which images are appropriate have evolved. She no longer sees gory pictures showing blood or organs as acceptable. She has tried harder to shoot younger fetuses, because that's when most abortions take place, and she said she also believes that the most graphic images should not be deliberately directed at children because "they can't intellectualize what they're seeing."

And yet an increasing number of pro-lifers who use such images justify deliberately targeting children by arguing that it is too late for adults (we have already made up our minds about abortion), while children are (as one put it) "not yet in that horrible fog." And some even defend the use of such images by attacking the moral character of teenagers *en masse*. Because some teenagers engage in premarital sex, and some portion of those who do have sex get pregnant, and some portion of those who do get pregnant have abortions, all children—including those who would not have an abortion if they were to get pregnant from the sex that they are not having—should be exposed to these terrifying sights.

As parents, we have an obligation to protect our children from the violence of abortion. But confronting them with such images accomplishes exactly the opposite: It draws them into the reality of abortion in a way that can do great damage to developing minds and souls.

For her second thoughts, Mrs. Miller is now being criticized by some of those who have used her pictures the longest. Flip Benham, director of Operation Rescue/Operation Save America, told Cave that Mrs. Miller's current stance is "a nice sentimental argument. What's important is truth to us; that this is the truth."

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There is something to be learned from the difference in the language that Mrs. Miller and Mr. Benham use. Perhaps it can be ascribed to Mrs. Miller's training in theology, but her description of her photos as a "record of the reality of abortion" is accurate, while Mr. Benham's claim that "this is the truth" is not.

This is not a mere semantic quibble. In the modern world, we often use the word *truth* as if it were synonymous with *reality*, but in Christian theology, as in classical philosophy, truth has a more limited, and more elevated, meaning. Abortion, by definition, is untruth; it is the destruction of the truth of human nature and of the created order. It is a direct assault not only on the child who is being torn apart, limb from limb, but on the God Who declared to the prophet Jeremiah, in that verse so familiar to pro-lifers, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5, RSV).

What happens when we dwell on untruth, when we constantly expose ourselves and others to it, even with the best of intentions? We become inured to the reality of that untruth. The shock and the horror that we experienced when first confronted with pictures of aborted children dissipate; we need even more graphic images in order to excite the same feelings of revulsion.

We can see this in an anecdotal way in a picture that the *New York Times* ran alongside a front-page story, also by Mr. Cave, in the October 9, 2009, print edition. At a prayer vigil for Mr. Pouillon in Owosso in September, in front of a camper plastered with signs that read "Mommy, why do they want to kill me?" and "Abortion=Murder: The same by any name," several young girls stand talking. One, a pretty blond-haired girl perhaps 10 or 12 years old, has a broad smile on her face—while a foot or so behind her hangs a four- or five-foot image of a bloodied, mangled baby on a white sheet stained with more blood.

Mrs. Miller is right: "[T]hey can't intellectualize what they're seeing." What they can do, what they will do, is compartmentalize it, become desensitized, confuse the reality of evil with truth.

THAT VERY CONFUSION today afflicts the broader pro-life movement—even those who would never dream of using these graphic photos. Abortion has become a moral "issue"; a political "question"; a cultural "problem" to be solved. It has taken on a life of its own, separate from Christian teaching. Indeed, when pro-abortion zealots claim that opposition to abortion is simply an attempt to impose Christian morality, the usual response of Christian pro-lifers today is to point to Jewish and Muslim and even atheist pro-lifers, to declare that abortion is a matter of "civil rights" or "human rights," to compare it to slavery and point out that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s niece is a pro-lifer, to decry the unequal impact that abortion for sex selection has on unborn baby girls and to argue that any true feminist must, for that reason alone, be pro-life.

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What few will do is simply say, "Yes. And what of it?" At the time of Christ, both chemical and mechanical abortion were practiced in the Roman world; by the time that Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan, and for well over a millennium afterward in the Western world, such practices were shunned. How did that change come about? Through graphic representations of Flip Benham's "truth" of abortion? By petitioning the Roman Senate to outlaw such practices? No: It occurred through the widespread conversion of Romans to Christianity.

The *Didache*, the first-century document known to early Christians as the teaching of the Twelve Apostles, declared that "There are two Ways, one of Life and one of Death"; those who would follow the Way of Life that Christian converts had embraced "shall not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide." Why? Because such practices violate "universal human rights"? Because they are akin to the slavery that was commonplace in the ancient world? Because they make women no more than sex objects for men?

No. Such actions were to be avoided because they are the Way of Death, not of Life; they are untruth, and thus op-

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posed to the Truth that will set us free.

Some may object that the civil-rights and human-rights and slavery and feminism arguments carry weight today, while Christianity does not. How can we expect to win the fight against abortion if we cannot even get people to listen to us?

But what exactly is it that we are fighting against? Better yet, what exactly is it that we are fighting for? Abortion is not simply a cause of our civilizational decline, though it is that; more importantly, it is a symptom—a symptom, first and foremost, of the increasing destruction of Christianity from within.

IN *CASTI CONNUBI*, his 1930 encyclical on Christian marriage, Pope Pius XI speaks of the proper role of the state in upholding the teachings of the Church, but he never loses sight of the fact that "the family is more sacred than the State and that men are begotten not for the earth and for time, but for Heaven and eternity." That is why there can never be a purely political solution to a cultural problem; if we put our trust in princes who have forgotten that God is the source of their authority, then our trust is likely to be betrayed when the teachings of the Faith threaten to bridle their passion for political power.

The solution is for the Church to play the role that She played in the conversion of the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages. As Pius XI writes,

> For the preservation of the moral order neither the laws and sanctions of the temporal power are sufficient, nor is the beauty of virtue and the expounding of its necessity. Religious authority must enter in to enlighten the mind, to direct the will, and to strengthen human frailty by the assistance of divine grace. Such an authority is found nowhere save in the Church instituted by Christ the Lord.

But surely the hour is too late; the day is too dark; we cannot spare the time necessary to convert the masses. Every year, 1.3 million children are murdered; are we simply to throw them to the wolves?

Of course not. But our time and attention are necessarily limited, and we need to focus on preventing abortions where they actually occur—not in the halls of Congress, or the Oval Office, or the chamber of the Supreme Court, but in the abortuaries and hospitals of our hometowns.

The unabashedly Christian 40 Days for Life campaign, held in towns and cities across the United States the past three Lenten seasons, is a perfect example of the kind of pro-life action that can and does make a difference. Volunteers take turns holding vigil, praying the rosary and offering other prayers of intercession for the women entering the abortuaries, the men who brought them there, the children whose lives are being snuffed out before they even see the light of day, and even the "doctors" and "nurses" who perform and assist in the act of murder. The faithful offer sidewalk counseling, directing women who have doubts about their actions to crisis-pregnancy centers and even, in some cases, opening their own homes to frightened women and girls who thought they had nowhere else to turn.

Political measures can be undone, but every child whom we save becomes a living witness—an icon—of the love of God and a testimony that we Christians live what we preach. Focusing on what we can accomplish, rather than on what we have failed to accomplish over the course of 37 years, will allow us to begin to turn the debate around.

Remembering that our opposition to abortion is not separate from our belief in Christ is but the first step. Simply urging mothers to "Choose Life" will not end abortion on the mass scale that we see it practiced today; bringing them to the One Who is the Way and the Truth and the Life will. Rome wasn't converted in a day, and the United States will not be, either. But she will never be converted as long as our actions lead others to believe that we value the cause of life more than the Way of Life.

ON THE LAST DAY of His earthly life, Christ stood before Pontius Pilate and declared, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." Beholding the Creator of the world and the Savior of mankind, His body bruised by the blows of the servants of the high priest and His face covered with their spittle, Pilate responded, "What is truth?"

The bruises and the spittle were reality, but they obscured the truth that Pilate sought. And in the end, he sent that Truth away to be crucified—the same Truth Who, through His Resurrection, wrought the conversion of the Roman Empire and even, some traditions say, of Pontius Pilate himself.

We can end abortion in the United States in the same way that Christians ended abortion in the Roman Empire: by finding our hope in the Truth of the Gospel, rather than despairing in the reality of evil.

Scott P. Richert is Chronicles' *executive editor. Portions of this article previously appeared in the* Wanderer *and on the About.com GuideSite to Catholicism* (Catholicism.About.com).

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How Do You Make $100 Million Per Day?

by William J. Quirk

HOW DO YOU MAKE $100 million per day? Goldman Sachs did it—and still does it. It even brags about it. Goldman's net revenues for 2009 were over $45 billion. Most of this—$34.37 billion—came from trading. During the second and third quarters of 2009, Goldman made over $100 million per day on 82 out of 130 trading days. It lost money on only three days during the same period. Goldman explained that they were brighter than other people. They were "doing God's work," as Chairman Lloyd Blankfein put it. Well, maybe; it does sound miraculous. But could we have a few details? Goldman is the biggest player in the $600–800 trillion derivatives market. Everyone agrees Goldman is operating with a "too big to fail" taxpayer guarantee. If we are going to have to pay for it when it blows up, we should at least know what is going on.

The derivatives market is huge. The entire world economic output in 2009 was $66 trillion. The derivatives market is perhaps ten times that. And twenty years ago, that market did not even exist.

What is a derivative? In a March 4, 2008, report, the Joint Committee on Taxation gives a technical definition: It is a "bilateral (two-party) executory contract . . . with a limited term (lifespan), the value of which is determined by reference to the price of one or more fungible securities, commodities, rates (such as interest rates), or currencies (an 'underlier')."

Essentially, it "is a wager with respect to the change in the price or yield of an underlier." Derivatives were unenforceable until President Clinton, with bipartisan support, signed the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, which exempted them from being treated as gambling contracts.

In a February 12 *Financial Times* interview, former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker frankly admitted he does not understand "all the complications of the financial market." For that matter, he added, "I don't know how many of the leaders of these institutions understand it either." What Volcker did understand is that "it's very complicated. It has given rise to a great amount of opaqueness which has made it difficult to manage."

The financial industry usually refers to credit default swaps (an "over the counter" derivative) as "insurance," but that's misleading. In insurance, you create a pool and charge each customer a premium based on the total risk of the pool. With credit default swaps there is no insurance pool, no reserves, and no regulator. The credit default swap is a wager.

Goldman and the bankers say the purpose of derivatives is to spread risk. You own *x* bond but are worried about it, so you can go buy a credit default swap to "insure" against its failing—your counterparty will pay you if it defaults. Of course, the counterparty can make the same assessment you can as to the likelihood of default. Your behavior is obviously not reasonable: If you had lost confidence in the bond, you would sell it. If you bet one horse at the track but changed your mind as post time approached, you could insure against the one horse losing by betting the other seven horses. That would eliminate the risk, but would it be considered rational behavior?

The reader is no doubt startled to learn that taking bets is part of the business of banking. We can thank the U.S. Supreme Court for that. The National Bank Act limited banks to the "business of banking" as defined in section 24(7), which described traditional banking functions. That lasted from 1863 to 1995. In *NationsBank of N.C.* v. *Variable Annuity Life Ins. Co.* (1995), the Court held the enumerated banking powers were overly restrictive—they were hamstringing the banks. The comptroller of the currency, at his "reasonable discretion," could authorize other activities. But his "reasonable discretion" proved to be a slender reed to rely on, and, before long, the banks were heavily engaged in making gambling contracts. At the track, a *pari-mutuel* ticket is called a bet. At Goldman Sachs, it is called a credit default swap or a CDO or a CMBC. They all have the same social utility—none.

When President Obama took office he hired Wall Street to clean up Wall Street. Now, as one might have guessed, that has not worked out. Nothing was fixed, and none of the fundamental problems were even addressed. Instead the Fed just flooded the system with dollars. That reinflated the stock-market bubble, but the economy continues to lose jobs every month. Columbia professor and Nobel Prize winner Joseph E. Stiglitz writes that the efforts to save the banking system were "so flawed" because those responsible for the trouble—Larry Summers and Tim Geithner—were put in charge of the repair by the Bush and Obama administrations. Wall Street created the mess by taking on unmanaged risk and excessive lever-

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age through nontransparent deals that were often hidden off-balance-sheet. The rescue by the Fed, the FDIC, and the Treasury depended on yet more leverage, off-balance-sheet entities, and nontransparent guarantees. In his book *Freefall*, Stiglitz writes, "When the private markets were at the point of meltdown, all risk was shifted to the government." The real problem with the rescue effort, of course, is that the banks should not have been rescued. They should have been closed. The IMF reports that U.S. banks had incurred almost two trillion dollars in losses—they were bust. They still are.

The busted banks created a problem because Congress, following the public's reaction to the September 2008 TARP law, would not vote money for any further bank bailouts. The Constitution, of course, gives Congress exclusive control of spending. Nonetheless, both the Bush and the Obama administrations used the Fed, the FDIC, and the Treasury to do an end run around the Constitution. They pursued policies they knew had no democratic legitimacy. After all, as Tammany Hall's George Washington Plunkitt used to say, "What's a Constitution among friends?"

The tote board at Aqueduct is transparent—it reports what is being bet on every horse every couple of seconds. Not the derivatives market. Nomi Prins, a former managing director at Goldman, spent two weeks sifting through the financial statements of the major derivatives players. Exasperated by the indecipherable information, she concluded that it is "virtually impossible to get an accurate, or consistent picture of the banks 'real money' . . . vs. their 'play money' . . . " Goldman explains that its activities are divided into three segments: Investment Banking, Trading and Principal Investments (including Fixed Income), and Asset Management and Securities Services. Seventy-five percent of their 2009 revenues came from Trading and Principal Investments.

Goldman is a public company. Does the Fed or SEC require it to disclose contingent liabilities, at least in footnotes? Not so much. In an SEC Form 10-Q report (June 26, 2009), Goldman tells us that accounting standards do not require that all derivatives be disclosed: "FIN No. 45 does not require disclosures about derivative contracts if such contracts may be cash settled. . . . If these conditions have been met, the firm has not included such contracts in the tables below." So the taxpayers don't know how many risky bets they are backing or how much that backing will cost when the bill comes due. Could it be $100 trillion? It's possible. It could be more.

"People who know the industry and know Goldman Sachs know that it is a giant hedge fund, but it's wrapped in an investment banking wrapper," says Prof. Samuel Hayes of Harvard Business School. He adds that the public "would be horrified to think that their tax dollars were going to a hedge fund." In a December 21, 2009, *Bloomberg.com* story, Peter Solomon, a New York investment banker, agrees: "Everybody thinks they're a bank, but they're a hedge fund. . . . The difference is that this year they're using your money to do it."

President Obama announced on January 21 what he called the "Volcker Rule":

> [W]e intend to close loopholes that allowed big financial firms to trade risky financial products like credit default swaps and other derivatives without oversight. . . . Never again will the American taxpayer be held hostage by a bank that is "too big to fail." . . .
>
> First, we should no longer allow banks to stray too far from their central mission of serving their customers. In recent years, too many financial firms have put taxpayer money at risk by operating hedge funds and private equity funds and making riskier investments to reap a quick reward. And these firms have taken these risks while benefiting from special financial privileges that are reserved only for banks.

When does "never again" start? Not one rule has been changed since the financial crisis started. The big banks, within hours of the President's announcement, said they had already figured out how to get around Obama's new rule. The main loophole is that the President's plan permits any transaction with a customer. The banks will say that is largely what they do. One bank said the new rule would affect less than one percent of its overall business. On February 2, Treasury Secretary Geithner told the Senate Finance Committee that the Volcker Rule needed to be "sensible and careful and recognize the reality of the way institutions are run." Geithner's timid approach places him at odds with Volcker, who testified the next day that the bankers knew "very well" what proprietary trading was. Moreover, Volcker said that if the bankers tried to evade the new rules, they should be met with a "strong regulatory response." In any case, Goldman does not take deposits and, if it gives up its status as a bank holding company, will be completely free of the Volcker Rule. The derivatives they buy and sell all have customers, to the tune of $600-800 trillion.

What caused the crisis? Could these new, exotic, and

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poorly understood derivatives be the cause? Could a casino taking bets ten times the size of the world's economic output be a little unstable? Did the leverage and lack of transparency built into the derivatives bring down first the financial system and then the real economy? On December 3 Ben Bernanke testified to the Senate Finance Committee that derivatives, of course, had nothing to do with the Great Depression, but "clearly, in this crisis, they were a big issue." The only justification for the Fed's bailout of AIG's bad bets was that, if it failed to do so, a string of Chinese firecrackers would start going off. And when they were done, all of our financial institutions would probably be bust. The new Obama reforms do not touch derivatives.

How does Goldman make money? The question is simple but the answer elusive. Goldman Sachs explains it is

> offering broad market-making . . . on a global basis. . . . Our willingness to make markets, commit capital and take risk in a broad range of fixed income, currency, commodity and equity products and their derivatives is crucial to our client relationships and to support our underwriting business by providing secondary market liquidity.

Trading net revenues come from "spreads" that are "modest" in large, highly liquid markets and "generally larger" in less liquid markets.

Goldman—and the other big banks—describe their activities as "market-making," but that is a deceptive label. A market maker, for example, is a dealer in the over-the-counter stock market. He stands ready to buy and sell *x* stock: He will buy your *x* stock at $100 (the ask price), and he will sell *x* stock to someone else at $102 (the bid price). The two-dollar difference is the "spread." The market maker's risk is that the market will break sharply against what he is holding, and the spread is to cover that risk. But Goldman and the other banks are not dealing in *x* stock; they are dealing in their own obligations. They are liable on all the bets just as your regular bookie is. J.P. Morgan is committed to pay $25 trillion on various bets. Goldman is the major player in the market, so it may well be obliged to pay $100 trillion on its bets. Or it may be trying to collect $100 trillion from counterparties who can't pay. If Goldman disagrees with the $100 trillion estimate, it is free to make public the actual number. We all look forward to that.

Goldman tries to offset its bets by making bets the other way, thus laying the risk off on others. Assuming it can place an offsetting bet, Goldman's only risk is "counterparty risk," which means that, while Goldman remains liable on its bets, someone (like AIG) who owes them money can't pay. The Goldman counterparties, on the other hand, have to worry about Goldman's ability to pay. The offsetting bets are, of course, pointless if they are made at the same odds. Goldman can book a nice profit by taking a bet that Greek bonds will default for a premium of $100,000 per year for five years to cover $1 million of bonds if it can turn around and lay off that bet for $90,000. The risks, though, are at least three: Goldman may fail and not pay on its bet; Goldman may not be able to find a counterparty to make the offsetting bet profitable; and Goldman's counterparty may not pay.

The wider the spread, the greater the profit. And the wide spread is where we find the $100 million per day. Derivatives generate huge profits, but they are likely to destabilize our economy again as they did in September 2008.

Goldman's role as the major derivatives dealer means it knows which way the bets are going. Its unique position provides information not available to its competitors, and many profitable opportunities. The derivatives market is an oligopoly consisting of Goldman and the big banks. Competitors are discouraged by a huge barrier to entry—*i.e.*, the bettor has to believe the bookie will pay a $50 billion bet. Who would you trust to pay $50 billion except an entity deemed "too big to fail," with its implied taxpayer guarantee?

A RACETRACK BET is simple. Derivatives are not. They are very seldom traded, and the original TARP idea—the government would buy the banks' toxic assets—was abandoned because they are so complicated that they are impossible to price.

Derivatives, having brought down our economy, are now bringing down the euro. Goldman's derivatives helped Greece hide her excessive borrowing from the European Union. In the 1990's Japanese companies used derivatives to hide losses, a practice they called *tobashi*—"to make fly away." Derivatives are used to evade accounting, banking, securities, and tax regulation. Indeed, all financial reporting since derivatives have showed up has become problematic.

The U.S. economy prospered without derivatives. It has not prospered since they were legalized in 2000. Paul Volcker recently noted,

> I have found very little evidence that vast amounts of innovation in financial markets in recent years have had a visible effect on the productivity of the economy. Maybe you can show me that I am wrong. All I know is that the economy was rising very nicely in the 1950s and 1960s without all of these innovations. Indeed, it was quite good in the

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> 1980s without credit-default swaps and without securitization and without CDOs. . . . I do not know if something happened that suddenly made these innovations essential for growth. In fact, we had greater speed of growth and particularly did not put the whole economy at risk of collapse. That is the main concern that I think we all need to have.

President Obama should move to repeal the 2000 law legalizing derivatives. That law is propping up a volatile $600-$800 trillion casino. And the next time it fails, the taxpayer will not prop it up; our resources and patience are exhausted.

The President is said to admire Teddy Roosevelt. He should take a page from Teddy's book and start busting up the banks. The Big Five should become the Very Large Twenty. That would be a start. "Too big to fail" must be killed.

William Quirk is the author of Courts & Congress. *Janek Kazmierski and Andrew deHoll, third-year law students, gave invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article.*

Triptych: Crows

by Jon Dressel

i

They came roistering through the city
every day at dusk, finished with
their pillaging in fields of corn

to east, and bound for woods out to
the west to make a roost for night;
they were part of the darkening of the sky.

They came at first by fours and fives
but soon great squadrons filled the air,
circling, swooping, rasping caws,

descenders peeling by the drove
to rest in clusters like black fruit
atop the shade trees of our yards.

We watched through windows, then went out,
like shamans of some threatened tribe,
to drive them on with banging pans.

ii

When the virus hit, West Nile they named
it, brought to our parts harboring plague,
they took the brunt. Better they

than we, it struck us, as they died
by thousands in the woods and fields;
we read it in the papers, heard it

on the news, stood witness with each
twilight as they wasted down;
then they were gone. We did not miss

them early on, we still had starlings,
robins, sparrows, brilliant cardinals,
mottled doves, birds of the neighborhood,

not intruders, little in their presence
to stir rufflings of unease;
the pans hung silent on our walls.

iii

We sensed it slowly, vaguely, a strange
vacancy at dusk; we almost
grieved lost clusterings of blackness

in the trees. And when at last,
by twos and threes, we spied them
in the evening sky again,

we felt a quickening of the heart,
as if some thing gone vagrant in
our being was returning, tentative,

probing, bent on repossession of
its place in our blood scheme.
And now, as dark matures each day

we mark their slow and sure increase,
at peace with their resurgent presence,
armed against it, pans to hand.

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Middle Eastern Hijackers

HAVE THE ISRAELIS GONE CRAZY?

We have recently witnessed a number of incidents in which Israeli hostility to the West has been made manifest. Yet the Western world has been the biggest—indeed, the only—supporter of the Zionist project outside the Jewish Diaspora.

First, consider the ambush of Joe Biden in Israel, where he went to talk some sense to Tel Aviv on the troublesome issue of the settlements, the primary obstacle to restarting the peace process. No sooner had Biden's plane touched down than the Israeli minister of the interior made a startling announcement: The Israeli government would proceed with the construction of 1,600 more settlement houses in East Jerusalem. Blindsided, Biden remonstrated with his inhospitable "hosts" and then went back to Washington with his tail between his legs, while the Obama administration—in a rare display of American anger at our increasingly contentious "ally"—denounced the announcement (and its timing) as an "insult." Netanyahu then arrived in Washington, where he openly incited the large and very loud Israel lobby to push back hard against the administration.

Such defiance is nothing new for the Israelis, whose capacity for aggression isn't limited to shooting rock-throwing adolescents and demolishing their thousand-year-old homes. What's interesting is that this open and increasingly acrimonious rift with the United States occurs within the context of an unfolding scandal that may signal a break with the West. The murder of a top Hamas commander in Dubai by a team of some 27 Mossad agents has stirred an international diplomatic storm. Disguised as tourists, the assassins used passports forged by means of a massive identity-theft operation. According to the report filed by Britain's Serious Organised Crimes Agency, information gleaned from passports handed over to Israeli customs officials at Ben Gurion Airport and abroad was stolen and used to create, in effect, a passport "farm."

The revelation sent shock waves from London to Paris and even to Washington. London was the first to retaliate, with the expulsion of an unnamed "diplomat" from the Jewish state's London embassy.

The outcry in Parliament was wellnigh unanimous, with the Tory shadow foreign minister, William Hague, rising to remark that Israel is a repeat offender when it comes to forging British passports—referring to the early 1980's, when a Mossad agent left a sack of forged British passports, enclosed in an Israeli embassy envelope, in a phone booth.

More serious was the time when members of a PLO cell in London were arrested on suspicion of murder. Under interrogation, one member of the cell admitted to being a Mossad agent. The Brits were furious: The Israelis might have prevented the brutal murder of a Kuwaiti caricaturist who had dared mock Yasser Arafat. Instead of merely expelling a single Israeli "diplomat," the Thatcher government sent a number of them packing and effectively shut down the Mossad in the United Kingdom.

The Israelis pledged never to do it again. Hague's implication that sterner measures are called for seems justified merely by what we already know—that Israel has compromised, perhaps fatally, our primary defense against terrorism, which is our ability to track who is coming into this country. The security of every other country on earth—excepting Israel—is threatened by this brazen violation of trust and the standards of civilized conduct. The cold fury of the British government was expressed in a terse announcement on the website of the Foreign Office:

> UK passport holders should be aware of a recent Serious Organised Crime Agency investigation into the misuse of UK passports in the murder of Mahmud al-Mabhuh in Dubai on 19 January 2010. The SOCA investigation found circumstantial evidence of Israeli involvement in the fraudulent use of British passports. This has raised the possibility that your passport details could be captured for improper uses while your passport is out of your control. . . . We recommend that you only hand your passport over to third parties including Israeli officials when absolutely necessary.

Individuals from Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands have been identified as having had their personal information stolen by the Mossad. So much for the Israeli tourist industry, which will now have to cater to those who don't mind having their identities stolen for a "good" cause. I'm just wondering when we will discover how many Americans have had their identities hijacked. ◆

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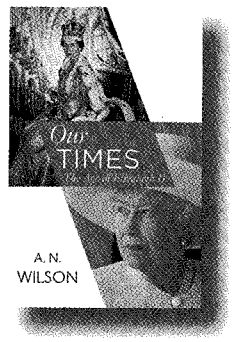

Soulcraft as Leechcraft

by Derek Turner

Our Times: The Age of Elizabeth II
by A.N. Wilson
New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux
496 pp., $30.00

THE PHOTOGRAPHS on the jacket of *Our Times* provide a pointed reminder that the British past is not just another country but another continent.

The newly crowned Queen looks self-conscious yet confident in Cecil Beaton's celebrated photograph of 1953, holding the scepter and orb of state in steady hands, her slender frame enveloped in ermine and brocade, on her head the crown of the monarchs of England, set there by the Archbishop of Canterbury during a rite harking back to King Edgar. Behind her is a receding prospect of fanes and flags, numinous light pouring through the medieval tracery to pick out the arches of Westminster Abbey studded with the banners of Britain's hereditary peerage.

The photograph beneath shows the Queen in her 80's—still elegant and dignified but wrinkled, weary, and wary-looking, haunted, perhaps, by what Britain has become while she looked on, nominally in charge but actually almost helpless.

Our Times is the concluding part of a trilogy, following *The Victorians* (2002) and *After the Victorians* (2005). It is an entertaining, evenhanded, unsentimental, usually compelling popular history that combines solid research and skillful storytelling with *apropos* anecdotes, catty animadversions, and some audacious assertions.

The Coronation, with its near-mystical mélange of young woman and redolent racial symbols, inspired polemics about how splendiferous things would be under Good Queen Bess the Second. The preeminent example of this short-lived genre, Philip Gibbs' *New Elizabethans* (1953), expresses the view that the Hakluyts, Drakes, and Shakespeares of the future were even then being born in hygienic hospitals, educated in new, comprehensive schools with big windows to let in the light of truth, and employed for life in state-of-the-art factories. Nothing, Gibbs and others intimated, could prevent a new Anglo-Saxon Protestant upsurge of innovation and derring-do. Instead, as Wilson notes, Elizabeth's reign has been the one "in which Britain effectively stopped being British."

He cites multifarious causes and effects—mass immigration, loss of religious faith, neglect of traditions, a decline in deference, the European Union, "tinkering with the constitution," globalization, family breakdown, "worship of things and products," devolution, and "the virtual dissolution" of the Church of England. A pivotal political development was the Suez debacle of 1956, when the United Kingdom's powerlessness *vis-à-vis* the United States was made shockingly plain.

Wilson sees the Britain of 1953 as an "awful place" in many ways and acknowledges subsequent improvements in technology, medicine, personal freedom, wealth, and choice. But he rues the profounder, subtler changes—"For T.S. Eliot, we had Andrew Motion; for Winston Churchill, we had Jacqui Smith."

Our Times commences with an ingenious discussion of *The Lord of the Rings*, with Tolkien's great vistas of passing grandeur colliding with a new literature of "perky, cheeky chappies" like Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, and John Braine. This new literature stemmed from the fact that, somehow, many Britons had simply stopped believing in the moral worth of their civilization and country. All institutions, traditions, and conventions had become attainted or ludicrous. The growing influence of Foucault and his followers was accompanied by a bombardment of criticism and ridicule, emanating from Royal Commissions as much as *Monty Python*. Aristocracy, aesthetics, patriotism, conservatism, even old buildings—all were exposed as mere prejudices, and prejudices had caused history's wars, persecuted inoffensive homosexuals, and kept women in the kitchen. Even those bastions supposed to be most supportive of "tribal magic" were overthrown by a mood of sullenness mixed with satire. Arthur Ramsey, the archbishop of Canterbury who, as bishop of Durham, had stood beside the young Queen as she intoned her oaths into the enchanted hush of the abbey, said after his retirement, "I hate the Church of England . . . it would not be a grief to me to wake up and find that the English establishment was no more."

But the die had been cast long before 1953, as scientific determinism and "open society" ideologies edged out faith and cus-

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tom. There is a certain shambling inevitability about Wilson's unfolding narrative of politicians, economists, academics, cultural arbiters, and technocrats—many intelligent, many sincere—slouching toward Gomorrah more or less at the mercy of what Harold Macmillan called "events, dear boy, events." None was ever fully in command, or realized what was happening, even after it had happened. Wilson concludes, "Attempts to draw up an order of prime ministerial incompetence during the period . . . would be invidious." Even Churchill did nothing; he was typified in his redundancy by his 1954 decision that, although it mattered hugely, it was "too soon" to take action on immigration. But he had at least been a great man, whereas Eden was merely "the only male British Prime Minister known to have varnished his fingernails . . . and the best-looking person of either sex to occupy that office during our period." Wilson heaps up whole Alps of bitchy and scornful commentary and aside. Liberalizing home secretary Roy Jenkins was "puffed-up, pompous and vacuous." The "stubborn and weirdly disengaged" Heath's chancellor Anthony Barber reminds Wilson of "a man playing the vicar in a suburban amateur dramatics society." Lord Mountbatten was "an elderly popinjay, with his offensively arrogant manners and his fondness for naval ratings." Wilson even accuses Mountbatten of allowing a million people to die during India's partition because he was more interested in attending the Queen's wedding than in attending to his viceregal responsibilities. It is passing strange that there should have been such mismanagement during the era that saw the arrival of the career politician.

Wilson exonerates the Queen of blame, although he feels she could have exerted influence in relation to the Church of England and the ennoblement of "scoundrels" by prime ministers. He hopes for more political courage from the Prince of Wales, almost the only person for whom Wilson has no barbed remark.

Wilson is excellent in describing how churches emptied, communities came apart, and crime skyrocketed because too few people in authority felt sure enough to make a stand, and those who did (and do) were (and are) undermined by others in authority, and by "events." This disintegration has had a massive psychic effect on Great Britain. Our prosperity has always had an aftertaste of angst; Wilson likens today's Britain to a banquet during which a sudden silence descends, giving diners the dyspeptic feeling that all is not well.

Intuiting this, recent governments have tried clumsily to promote new "values" derived from the philosophies *à la mode*—secularism, human rights, classlessness, internationalism, and relativism. They have also tried, halfheartedly, to control the more exuberant manifestations of social alienation—the muggings, drive-by shootings, and race riots of the inner cities, and, more recently, terrorist acts emanating not from Helmand madrasas but Yorkshire schools. When these proved largely intractable, the authorities turned their attention to the middle classes' smoking, drinking, eating, and driving habits, or gun ownership, or white-collar crime, or "offensive" sentiments. The period under discussion has accordingly seen the rise in Britain of anarcho-tyranny—the bipolar state as incompetent as it is intrusive.

Wilson is highly respected for his knowledge of 19th-century literature, but rather laughed at for his highly public theological tergiversations (Anglican ordinand, Roman Catholic, Anglican, atheist, and, as of April last year, Anglican) and feuds (in his new book, he renews an old grudge against his literary rival Bevis Hillier). He often writes for effect in *Our Times*—and sometimes misfires. For example, he compares the launch of the First Crusade in 1095 with—drum roll—Keith Joseph speaking on monetarism to Preston Conservatives. There is evidence of hastiness. Wilson writes "diffusing" when he means "defusing" and "disciplines" for "disciples." He alludes to "the greatest historian of Berlin" without vouchsafing his identity, and once puts "married clergy" when he means "celibate clergy."

Serious cavils include stating that intelligence agencies precipitated the Iraq war, whereas As Any Fule Kno it had more to do with politicians who wished the world to conform to their postmodern pattern book. He finds Blair "essentially conservative," and even compares him with Burke for reforming rather than revolutionizing the House of Lords. He has a camp fixation with Princess Diana—whom he considers also "essentially conservative" for her role in "democratizing" the monarchy. After acknowledging that mass immigration has been, and will probably continue to be, problematic, he claims that Enoch Powell was motivated mostly by "the desire to cut a dash," that his plans to stop immigration would have been "cruel and brutal," and even implies that Powell was deranged. It seems ungracious so to dismiss one of the very few politicians of the period who really wanted to do something for his country (although, as we know, he never did). And of course, like most conservatives, Wilson is much more interested in describing than prescribing; there are no positive suggestions as to how we might even yet recover from the bumbling leechcraft that has brought a self-confident nation-state to teeter on the cusp of dissolution.

Our Times will be of considerable utility to anyone seeking to gain a rounded view of the past 50 years in Britain, and to understand how, through mistakes more than malice, Britain has arrived in such strange and disconcerting circumstances. A half-century hence, the book will be an interesting period piece for the inconceivable country of 2060, a record of how early-21st-century people of taste reacted to decades of quietly revolutionary events—reacted, but failed ever to respond.

Derek Turner is the editor of The Quarterly Review.

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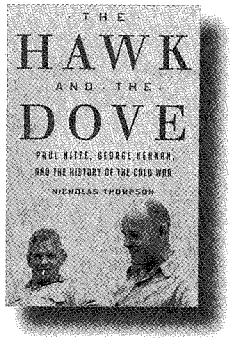

Parallel Lives

by John Lukacs

The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War
by Nicholas Thompson
New York: Henry Holt and Co.
416 pp., $27.50

NICHOLAS THOMPSON, the grandson of Paul Nitze, chose to write a biography of his grandfather, but with a restriction. Thompson thought it best to describe and compare his grandfather's public career together with that of another public personage, George Kennan. I wonder why. Perhaps for the sake of an extensive biography. We ought not attribute motives to an author, but we can say something about the result. This is a book of parallel lives; but such a structure, or composition, seldom works.

Though Paul Nitze and George Kennan were very different men, their lives were chronologically similar. Both were men of the 20th century: Kennan was born in 1904; Nitze in 1908. Kennan survived Nitze by less than a year, but that does not matter. What matters is that their temperaments, their learning, their convictions, and their views of the United States and of the world were profoundly different. Kennan was a compulsive writer and a dedicated thinker; Nitze was a compulsive bureaucrat. Kennan was an intensely private person; Nitze was not. At least in one instance Nitze's grandson understands this: "Kennan never fit in; Nitze always did." They knew each other, they respected each other on occasion, but they never were close friends.

Thompson's thesis is there in the title of his book: Throughout the Cold War, Nitze was a hawk; Kennan was a dove. That is too simple, and Thompson knows it; at least once he does qualify the meaning of these categories. There was a dove within the hawk (all right: but only very seldom); there was a hawk within the dove (more often, and usually at the right time). But there was nothing like an equivalence here, and no real parallel. Kennan's character was profound. There was a deep consistency inherent in his anticommunism and his anti-anticommunism, because he was a man of principles and not of ideas. Nitze may not have been unprincipled, but he mistook and represented ideas as if they were principles, in particular the ideology of anticommunism. He was a bureaucrat rather than an opportunist; but he found it opportune enough to ally himself with many of the most unsavory spokesmen for a global American crusade, the neoconservatives: for example, Richard Perle. Nitze drafted and wrote many memoranda on American security during almost half of a century. Few of them are worth reading; none has any lasting value. With few exceptions, Kennan's writings have survived their time; they are worth reading, and even pondering, today.

A full history of the Cold War will never be written. The topic is too large and complex. The development of the Cold War and its happenings were produced and promoted on so many different levels. One shortcoming of this book: Thompson is sometimes wrong about some of these events. Thus, *The Hawk and the Dove* does not quite qualify as an important contribution to the convoluted history of the Cold War. Yet the filial respect that moved Thompson to compose this book is commendable, and often also honest: On one important occasion, Thompson tells us that Nitze recorded the very opposite of what he had actually said.

John Lukacs is the author, most recently, of The Legacy of the Second World War.

An Excerpt

Paul Nitze and George Kennan were the only two people to be deeply involved in American foreign policy from the outset of the Cold War until its end. They had come to prominence in the tumultuous days that followed the Second World War when Germany was divided and the Soviet Union turned from ally into enemy. They immersed themselves in the great questions and events to come: the Marshall Plan, Korea, the ever more dangerous arms race, Vietnam, détente, SALT, glasnost. They stepped offstage only when Germany reunited and the Soviet Union dissolved.

—*from* The Hawk and the Dove, *by Nicholas Thompson*

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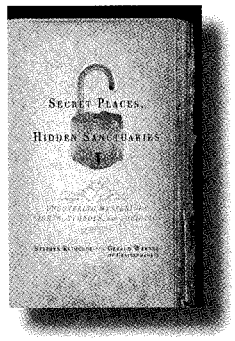

Gobbling Poison

by Charles A. Coulombe

Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries: Uncovering Mysterious Sights, Symbols, and Societies
Stephen Klimczuk and
Gerald Warner of Craigenmaddie
New York: Sterling Publishing Co.
272 pp., $19.95

Mankind loves mysteries—the weirder the better. Throughout recorded history, rites open to the initiated only have been performed in restricted sanctuaries; this not only provides a feeling of superiority to the participants but allows outsiders to indulge in endless speculation about "what really goes on" at such times and in such places. The rise of egalitarianism since the 18th century has added the frisson of class consciousness. Moreover, the existence of miraculous relics and sacred totems, the undeniable attempts of certain groups to wield power out of proportion to their numbers, and the fact that history is written by the victors (allowing for the defeated to weave alternate stories—more or less accurate than the received narratives—for general consumption) have provided fertile ground for a certain sort of writer and thinker over the past several centuries. Never has that ground been more fertile (or, at least in some cases, more profitable) than today. Dan Brown, for one, has been a recipient of the resulting literary largesse.

Adding to the complexity of the situation is that, over the past century, the sacred has been increasingly driven from public life—not merely in government, where monarchies and their "By the Grace of God" ceremonial have been either whittled down or done away with altogether, but even in more secular republics, such as our own. The abandonment, say, of formal morning dress for presidential inaugurations and the openings of state assemblies may have its roots in both egalitarianism and a general fatigue on the part of our elites, but it also points to a loss of whatever whiff of the sacred republican governance still clung to. Much the same may be said of the simplifying of judicial, academic, and civic costume and ritual—to say nothing of the liturgies of many of the churches, where one would expect the sacred to maintain its sway.

These developments have also fueled the growth of public interest in the uncanny: People chase ghosts, UFOs, and conspiracies with all the fervor their ancestors might have expended on pursuing holy relics and making pilgrimages to miraculous shrines. The more orthodox among us might suspect that this is a concrete demonstration of C.S. Lewis's dictum that "spiritual nature is like physical nature; deny it food, and it will gobble poison." Nevertheless, despite the vast difference in specific goals between the old quests for the numinous and the new, the subjective goal, perhaps, is similar: the enchantment of mundane, everyday life. Many people today hold that the Bilderbergers or the Illuminati are all-powerful, or that the U.S. government is concealing alien technology at Area 51, with all the certainty with which their grandparents held to the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the divine origin of the Ten Commandments. Of course, quite apart from questions of objective truth, the newer beliefs are unlikely to produce a Saint Augustine or a St. Thomas Aquinas.

Into this murky realm the authors of this book intrude themselves, keen on shedding light on a vast number of mysterious places, persons, and things that have long agitated the curiosity of the reading public. UFOs and Area 51? You'll find them here. The Bilderbergers, Masons, Yale's Skull and Bones, and the Templars? Check. They also turn their attention to such mysterious objects as the Grail, the Stone of Destiny, and the Ark of the Covenant. Indeed, the list goes on and on, from such benevolent shrines as Mount Athos to the satanic SS stronghold of Wewelsburg Castle, to the U.S. government's "secret" refuge of Mount Weather, Virginia. The pair even turn their attention to such preserves of quiet pleasure as London's clubs (explaining the very different meaning of the phrase *gentleman's club* in England and America) and Disneyland's elite Club 33. Ranging far and wide, the authors display three qualities uncharacteristic of the explorers of such places: solid erudition, sympathetic but thorough skepticism, and a willingness to admit that some things are indeed beyond our ken. Moreover, the narrative is genial; while keen on entertaining their readers, Klimczuk and Warner never attempt to make sport of the objects of their research, no matter how great the

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temptation.

Why is all of this important? Because, in Western society today, the irrational has an ever higher place in the popular consciousness. As Dan Brown's popularity shows—especially given the large number of people for whom his books are historical references—the direction of our culture is ever more into cloud cuckoo land. The ersatz messiahship of Obama, no less than the incessant chanting of jingoistic mantras by the neocons, reflects a headlong flight from reason into the comforting safety of the irrational.

In this strange atmosphere, dark rumors of conspiracy provide a welcome respite from the tiresome analysis of historical reality. Religion based purely on emotion—and its resulting disconnect in the minds of many from practical action and political decisions—allows many people to vote for candidates who despise the teachings of their faiths. All-encompassing oligarchies liberate one from personal responsibility for his tiny bit of the body politic. Where these notions raise their heads in this book, our authors, in a kindly and gentlemanly manner, smack them on the skull—save in those few cases in which there does seem to be some flame within the smoke. But even where they discount popular ideas, such as the all-powerful nature of Yale's Skull and Bones, they show why it might look that way, and how the rumors started.

Their search does not stop at fancied centers of hidden power. Klimczuk and Warner also take us to view places and things that do retain some sense of the sacred: the Grail Chapel in Valencia, the Pauline Chapel at the Vatican, and even the defunct Oracle at Delphi, which once held the destinies of Greece firmly in its grasp. The history and contradictory legends surrounding the Stone of Destiny, which may or may not have come from the Near East, thence to Ireland, and on to Scotland for the crowning of that country's kings (before being nicked by Edward I for English coronations), are thoroughly explored. So, too, are the Crown of St. Stephen, which even today is considered as a sort of "eternal ruler" of Hungary, and the Holy Lance, which Hitler thought would give him unending control of Germany, and perhaps the world.

Given the current state of affairs, *Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries* may be a useful volume in the library of any denizen of the 21st century who wishes to remain among the sane.

Charles A. Coulombe is the author, most recently, of The Pope's Legion: The Multinational Fighting Force That Defended the Vatican.

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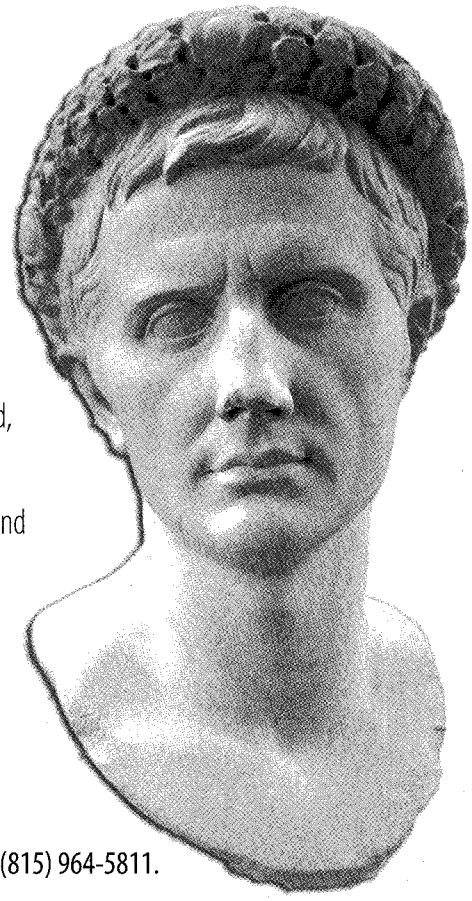

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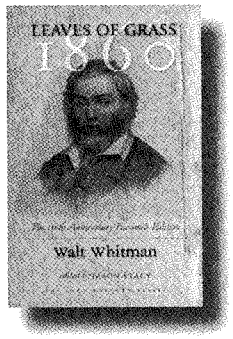

Prometheus Unbound

by Catharine Savage Brosman

Leaves of Grass
by Walt Whitman; edited by Jason Stacy
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press
528 pp., $24.95 paper

This volume, belonging to the Iowa Whitman Series, is identified as "the 150th Anniversary Facsimile Edition" of *Leaves of Grass*, third edition (1860). Originally issued in 1855, at the author's expense, the collection was revised and republished in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871, 1881-82, and finally 1892. The versions varied greatly in length and contents, as Whitman added numerous poems, while removing some and revising, retitling, regrouping, and otherwise modifying others. The first edition contained only 12 poems, the second 32. In 1860, he added 146 new ones. Later editions are viewed as less masterful. This 1860 version thus contains the poet's most characteristic voice and delineates him most fully: the people's bard, a prophet, sage, celebrant of the nation and its distinctive popular government—and the creator, on what turned out to be the eve of a horrible war, of a national *imago* by which, he dreamed, conflict might be avoided and a kind of democratic salvation brought about.

Though the font used for the table of contents is regrettably small, the rest of the 1860 typography may delight those who enjoy the appearance of an older book, especially the original title page, with its flowing cursive writing and the publisher's imprint, "Boston, Thayer and Eldridge, Year 85 of the States, 1860-61." The structure of the long collection is noteworthy, with its curious typographic arrangements (including numbered clusters of lines) and part divisions, bearing titles such as "Chants Democratic" and "Enfans d'Adam"—the out-of-date spelling of *enfants* suiting such other old spellings as *Mannahatta* and *Kanada* and unusual American terms that impart almost a frontier flavor.

Leaves of Grass is viewed by many as the most important collection by any American poet—certainly the most important at the time—and Whitman remains a giant in American literary history. His contribution to the creation of a vigorous free verse is enormous—his versatile lines (often long) and, in place of metric, line, and stanza regularity, the so-called organic principle of composition (which allowed him to expand and otherwise alter poems). Nothing that 20th-century American poets (such as T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound) proposed had any similar influence. (Pound wrote in "A Pact," his homage poem to Whitman, "It was you who broke the new wood, / Now is a time for carving.") Even in the development of French free verse, Whitman's example was influential, though not crucial. To be sure, an enormous amount of extremely bad poetry has been written in his wake; and some readers today are still not reconciled to free verse, of course. But to develop a new mode of expression is no mean feat, and Whitman can scarcely be blamed for its abuses. Moreover, Whitman's celebration of himself avoids the psychological narcissism that characterizes that of confessional poets, including Robert Lowell, and vast quantities of verse today. Even as the first-person pronoun occupies an enormous place, Whitman looks outward and writes of the general, not the particular, seeing individual life in an undifferentiated but connected order.

> The Many in One—what is it finally except myself?
> These States—what are they except myself?

Such rhetoric strikes a reader today as absurd, as well as bad—a dreadful mental and poetic pabulum—and many *Chronicles* readers will disagree with the assimilationist view that would, carried far enough, obscure distinctions and identities, including states'. Yet one should not overlook Whitman's aspiration to something other than today's solipsism. At least he "presses the pulse of life" rather than retreating into lotus-land.

Though Emerson, the "Sage of Concord," had praised Whitman's writing, and others hailed its "bold new voice," early reviews of this edition were often hostile or mixed, and for decades Whitman's work was widely viewed as immoral. Consider this statement in the *New York Times*: "Occasionally, a gleam of true poetic fire shines out of the mass of [Whitman's] rubbish, and there are tender and beautiful touches in the midst of his most objectionable and disagreeable writings." It re-

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mains easy to fault Whitman's work, on poetic, political, moral, or social grounds, or all. Undiscriminating, indeed all-embracing socially and culturally, he was the outstanding 19th-century multiculturalist, the voice of democracy at its broadest, thus lowest, level. His inclusive, expansionist style fit his vision but gave little consideration to formal beauty and none to taste. He was the quintessential natural poet, the late Romantic singing in the wilderness; the *Boston Globe* reviewer called him "the very child of nature." But he was also an early voice of urban and industrialized America.

These qualities are, of course, what made *Leaves of Grass* a new departure. Singing "Adamic songs," the poet elevated to a creed the 18th-century metaphor—indeed, vision—of America as "essentially the greatest poem," the New Eden. He even spoke of his work as a "New Bible," a claim underlined by his quasibiblical style, not intended, surely, as blasphemy. Today he would be hailed as the voice of American uniqueness or "exceptionalism," minority-group privileges, and, probably, the "living Constitution" (as well as a spokesman for a new sexual morality, or "the apotheosis of the flesh," as the London *Sunday Times* put it in 1860). Indeed, some reviewers of this facsimile volume will, like Mark Doty in his cover comment, remind us that national unity has not yet been achieved, that democracy is still imperfect, that we must struggle to extend the vision of liberty and equality still further. With that noble aim in mind, critics need not assess the poetic merits of the verse; like much other rhetoric and so-called poetry today, it will be judged worthy by its social sentimentalism, *ipso facto*. As Gide wrote, "It is with good sentiments that bad literature is made."

If you want to add an original-looking Whitman to your library, choose this reprint rather than a used copy of the 1961 facsimile, edited by Roy Harvey Pearce. The Introduction is lucid, and the annotations are useful. I shuddered, however, at the word "buzz" (talk), comma splices, and other errors. Jason Stacy, the editor, is an historian, not a literary critic. "As a historian, I understand literature as the product of past events, biographical moments, and aesthetic trends." Stacy's approach is sound, and he illuminates the poet in today's intellectual context and in terms that nonspecialists will understand. Whether one approves or not of Whitman's prosody and outlook and what admirers have made of him, his figure and work remain with us.

Catharine Savage Brosman is Chronicles' *poetry editor.*

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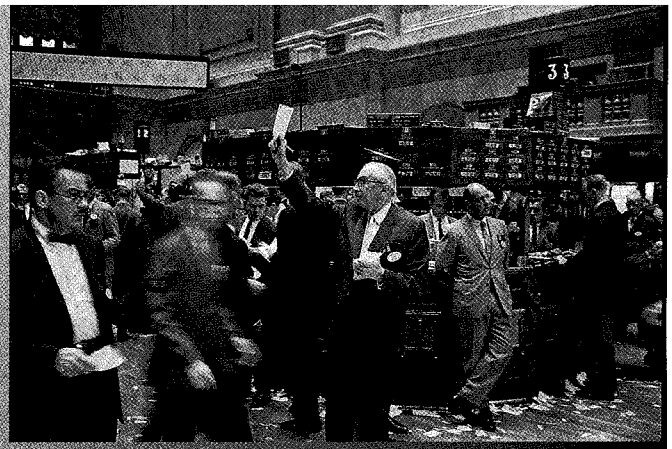

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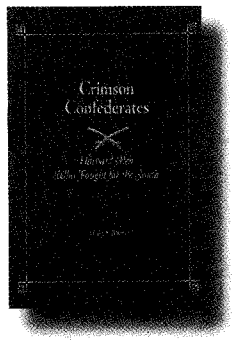

Unknown Soldiers

by Clyde Wilson

Crimson Confederates: Harvard Men Who Fought for the South
by Helen P. Trimpi
Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press
380 pp., $59.00

THOMAS CARLYLE wrote that "History is the essence of innumerable Biographies." While that description does not cover all the duties of historianship, it is true in an important sense. History that becomes too abstract loses its vital connection with the lives of real human beings. The people of the past were human, and we are human: That is the primary reason that most of us are interested in them. To know the lives of our past is especially important now, when mainstream American history is dominated by the imposition of theoretical categories engendered by the ethnic and class conflicts of Europe. Some large proportion of the American population, and an even larger proportion of academic historians, feel no connection to, and often an active hostility toward, the Americans who lived before the 20th century.

It therefore does us good to have this rich biographical collection of the 357 Harvard men (including from the university's law and medical schools) who fought for the South in the great American slaughter of 1861-65. The research is wide, deep, and painstaking. We learn much about the education, careers, westward movement, family connections, and war experiences of several generations of Americans—including, as will astound current trendy vendors of history, a Mexican-American, a Cuban-American, several Jews, and at least 20 Northern-born Confederates.

Professor Trimpi, who is better known as a prolific and prize-winning poet, was brought to this project by her academic study of Herman Melville. As she writes, in his poems and his other works, especially *The Confidence-Man*, "the feeling Melville expresses defies the conventional attitudes of most Unionists." One of her fine long poems is a dialogue between Melville and his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw of Massachusetts, who suffered obloquy for supporting the Constitution even when it favored the South. The point is that there was a wide array of Northern viewpoints about the war, and there were Northerners, not a few, who refused to be drawn into a campaign of hate against their Southern fellow countrymen before, during, and after the war—a part of American history that is almost unknown.

Seventy-one Harvard men (20 percent) who fought for the Confederacy gave their lives in defense of the South. Memorial Hall at Harvard contains the names of Harvard men killed in war, including at least one World War II Nazi. But the names of the dead Confederates are not to be found. A Union Army veteran first proposed that the dead Confederate alumni should be honored, and the idea has been put forward several times over the years, but has always been defeated.

Contributing editor Clyde Wilson is a recovering professor.

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Earthly Purposes

THE *NEW YORK TIMES*' obituary for Michael Foot, who led the Labour Party in the general election that brought Margaret Thatcher to power in 1983 and who died in March at the age of 96, quotes the following passage from a campaign speech Mr. Foot delivered that year:

> We are not here in this world to find elegant solutions, pregnant with initiative, or to serve the ways and modes of profitable progress. No, we are here to provide for all those who are weaker and hungrier, more battered and crippled than ourselves. That is our only certain good and great purpose on earth . . .

It is not clear, absent the lack of immediate context, whether by "we" the socialist politician meant humanity born onto this earth or, more exclusively, his saintly comrades in Labour. Since his exhortation was part of a political stump speech, the presumption is in favor of the latter, and yet it is more than possible that the speaker really had in mind the former. Certainly, in an age in which politics has become religion, and religion, to a substantial degree, politics, the second understanding would not have struck Foot's audience as being in any way exceptional, or exceptionable.

Aristotle observed that, although all men claim the status of Man, only the man who devotes himself to the pursuit of knowledge actually deserves it. Under the Christian dispensation, one might rather argue that the man who is most fully Man is he who loves most fully, and dedicates his life to acting upon that love. I was moved to consider this possibility after the earthquakes in Haiti last winter, when it seemed almost that the world had ceased for a time to turn; that the human race had foresworn the pursuit of mammon, the lust for power, and the quest for knowledge in order to devote itself to the relief of the pathetic, poverty-stricken victims of brute nature. Of course the world had not stopped, and the illusion that it had was the result of just another experiment in virtual reality, a creation of the mass media. But should it have stopped? For a Christian especially, the question is not so ridiculous, so absurdly sentimental and impractical, as it might at first appear to be.

Political liberalism arrived at a theoretical affirmation of the proposition long ago. Christian theology, far more alarmingly, is halfway there, at least. And it is easy to see why. Jesus Christ, True Man and True God, and His disciples devoted their earthly lives to charity, and so did the saints who followed them. A religion that professes an ideal of co-suffering might quite logically affirm that no one is morally justified in enjoying the goods of this earth so long as anyone lacks them, and that material enjoyment is licit only as the earned reward for the eradication of poverty and misery from the face of the earth. Socialism, which Claude Polin argues is the expression of a distinctly Western impulse produced in minds prepared by Christianity to receive it, certainly affirms it, and so does liberalism, which is only socialism-and-soda in a Waterford glass. James Burnham said that liberals, including liberal groups, nations, and civilizations, are "morally disarmed before those whom the liberal regards as less well off than himself." But there is obviously, as Burnham pointed out, a paradox here, since to feel morally disarmed is to feel guilty, and liberals do not believe—at least they didn't, before liberalism was superseded by advanced liberalism and multiculturalism—in collective or inherited guilt, just as they deny the fact of inherited intelligence or cultural superiority. But Christians, brought up on stories pertaining to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Babylonian captivity, and the LORD's teaching that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the sons, are believers in the guilt of groups. Belief makes them susceptible to liberal assumptions of collective guilt, and to the conviction regarding a collective responsibility for the world that liberals teach. Unlike liberals, however, Christians tend toward a literal, rather than a theoretical (I mean smug and self-congratulatory), view of that responsibility.

FOR THE PAST YEAR I have subscribed to *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of Vatican City, in its weekly edition. There is much that is good in the paper, and a regular reading of it has certainly improved my Italian. Yet Pope Benedict's insistence on looking above the billion-odd heads of the faithful to address the wider world for whose welfare he has been given no direct responsibility, and his constant calls for *lo sviluppo umano integrale* (the whole development of man), are irritating, tiresome, and, so far as I can tell, without grounding in scripture. They may, however, find basis and justification in the most recent Catechism of the Cath-

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olic Church, prepared during the papacy of Pope John Paul II. The section entitled "The Social Doctrine of the Church" contains a paragraph explaining that these teachings developed in the 19th century as a result of the Gospel's encounter with the new industrial society that revolutionized relations between man and man, man and the state, and man and nature. The section "Justice and Solidarity Among Nations" might similarly have explained that the Church's teachings on international relations developed as a result of the Gospel's encounter with the institutions and mechanisms of liberal internationalism, which they accept and appear to take for granted. Thus, Paragraph 2439 states that "*Rich nations* have a grave moral responsibility toward those which are unable to ensure the means of their development by themselves or have been prevented from doing so by tragic historical events." According to Paragraph 2440, "It is also necessary to *reform* international economic and financial *institutions* so that they will better promote equitable relationships with less advanced countries" (italics in the original). The Catechism does not acknowledge the enormous obstacles inherent in reconstructing Third World societies, including the recurrence of "tragic historical events" endemic to the history of those countries, nor does it suggest the grounds on which its faith in the economic and financial institutions of global liberalism rests.

The liberal conscience is tormented, the liberal mind undone, by two stark realities. The first is that the global village is really a vast global slum; the second is that the modern communications system that created the "village" informs us on a 24-hour basis of unpleasant situations and conditions in remote places that we are incapable of changing, and that we should be better off never having heard about in the first place. (Knowledge is not always power.) The difficult—helping Haiti out in an emergency—is hard enough. Indeed, it is harder than the impossible—eradicating world misery—which is the task to which socialism, liberalism, and modern Christianity are calling us. ("Where there is no solution," Burnham said, "there is no problem.") Christ's poor were the widows, the orphans, the lame, the blind in a tiny occupied country in the Middle East, barely more than a collection of villages. They were what we might call the personal poor, a different case entirely from the vast, unknown, almost abstracted masses of the world poor, toward whom charity is a bureaucratic response rather than a biblical action, like giving alms.

But all of this is almost incidental to my broader point.

Michael Foot asserted in his speech that providing for the weak, the hungry, the battered, and the crippled is "our only certain good and great purpose on earth." One can—almost—hear the voice of Christ speaking those words, but He did not speak them, and they are not true, either in the political or in the theological context. Instead they express an extremely narrow view of politics—an apolitical view, in fact—and an equally narrow understanding of Christian theology, or any other theology I know of.

The world does not, it could not, it must not revolve around the claims, or even the needs, of the poor and the oppressed of the earth. Charity, even bureaucratic charity, is both a human obligation and a divine injunction, but man has many other things to be about in his Father's house, some of them having value and validity equal to those on the agenda of the British Labour Party. It is important for intelligent people, those in positions of power especially, to understand this, if only for the reason that the better part of the world is coming more and more to resemble Haiti, which it will very likely approximate in the future. If the civilized world should ever become convinced that its moral duty lies in deliberately merging itself with either the barbaric Third World or the semidepraved world of the lower classes of the West, that would be the end of civilization, and civilization is a moral duty of mankind, as the ancients understood. Aristotle said that the aim, business, and justification of government is the attainment of human excellence, and he was right, as always. Civilization, said Evelyn Waugh, "has no force of its own beyond what it is given from within. It is under constant assault and it takes most of the energies of civilized man to keep going at all."

The world is really doing quite enough for Haiti, Somalia, Kenya, Afghanistan, and other similarly benighted places. As for the British Labour Party, it has already done a great deal too much for the British poor, today among the most drunken and loutish in Western Europe, the youthful poor especially. "Michael Foot was a genuine British radical," Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in tribute to the deceased. "He possessed a powerful sense of community, a pride in our progressive past and faith in our country's potential for a radical future." Now that really gives Britons something to look forward to.

I myself am most impressed that Michael Foot should have written a number of books, among them *The Politics of Paradise: A Vindication of Byron*. I am not a great admirer of Byron or his poetry, and I have never read Foot's study of him. But I admire the author for so much as wishing to create so elegant, impractical, and decadent a thing as a book the British working man will never read. ◆

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Aaron D. Wolf

Healthcare Reformer

THE EMPIRE was beset by foreign invaders and war in the Middle East. Far-flung wars meant more taxes for the provinces and an increase in poverty. Some men had to choose between feeding their families and paying for medical care. Some couldn't afford either.

In the large urban centers, the poor were getting poorer, while the rich were getting richer. The wealthy—even in the churches—were given to elaborate and expensive entertainments. Keeping pedigreed horses was a favorite hobby. Aristocrats gobbled up the land of poor farmers and created vast estates for their champion thoroughbreds. Houses were lavishly decorated with gilded ceilings and mosaic-covered walls. Personal chefs and confectioners were employed.

To make matters worse, a false version of Christianity was on the rise. Within living memory, the emperor himself had confessed that Jesus Christ is fully God, "being of one substance with the Father." But now a new emperor, while claiming to be a Christian, was professing just the opposite. Soon, all of the old heretic pastors were out of the closet, and the emperor, in the interests of unity, was applying gentle persecution to bring the conservative pastors into line. In such an environment, any reasonable man would batten down the hatches, circle the wagons, and protect himself, his family, and his way of life.

Basil sold his vast inheritance and gave the money to the poor.

Now, Basil was no dummy. As his friend Gregory would write, Basil had mastered all of the classical arts—at Athens, no less—"with all the learning attainable by the nature of man." However, his interest was not in making piles of cash but in eternal salvation, and when he read the Gospels, he realized that this required, among other things, a "refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any sympathy towards things of earth."

Basil preferred to work out his salvation separated from the world in prayer and contemplation, but heresy and the needs of people intervened. So he found himself on a debate tour, arguing against Arianism and for the Nicene Creed. Before long he was ordained to the priesthood in his native Caesarea, Cappodocia, smack dab in the middle of Asia Minor. His powerful teaching captivated audiences—to the extent that he had to dial it back a bit, as the faithful preferred him to their bishop, Eusebius.

WHEN BASIL was not writing and preaching in defense of the deity of Christ, he was thundering against Christians who make an idol of their own possessions, loving wealth instead of others:

> You who dress your walls, and let your fellow-creatures go bare, what will you answer to the Judge? You who harness your horses with splendor, and despise your brother if he is ill-dressed; who let your wheat rot, and will not feed the hungry; who hide your gold and despise the distressed?

"Consider now the violent struggle that takes place between the desperation arising from famine and a parent's fundamental instincts," he continues. "Starvation on the one side threatens a horrible death, while nature resists, convincing the parents rather to die with their children."

Basil was no bleeding-heart liberal. He didn't think everyone everywhere deserves everything. He didn't blame the emperor for poverty or a lack of "adequate healthcare." His problem was with Christians who claimed to love God but refused to love their neighbors in need.

And so, in A.D. 370, when he took Eusebius' place as bishop, he built a hospital. Using alms from the diocese, Basil constructed a massive complex in suburban Caesarea for the care of the sick who couldn't afford medical treatment. This Ptochoptopheion or "New Town" (also called the Basiliad) was a wonder to the people of Cappodocia. It not only offered medical care but provided lodging for the homeless, job training for the indigent, and food for the hungry. The heresy-warrior bishop donned an apron and served in the soup kitchen.

That's a great story, but it's just not practical to apply it to our situation. Our government would never allow such a thing.

The emperor Valens had threatened Basil with exile repeatedly for his refusal to knuckle under to Arianism. At one point, Valens' prefect delivered the threat directly to Basil, who boldly defied him. The emissary marveled that no one ever used that tone with him. Basil replied, "Maybe you've never talked to a bishop before." Valens retaliated by hacking up Basil's diocese and installing an Arian as a rival bishop.

A few years later, a curious Valens came to hear St. Basil the Great on Theophany. He was so moved by the preaching that he donated the land for the Basiliad. ◆

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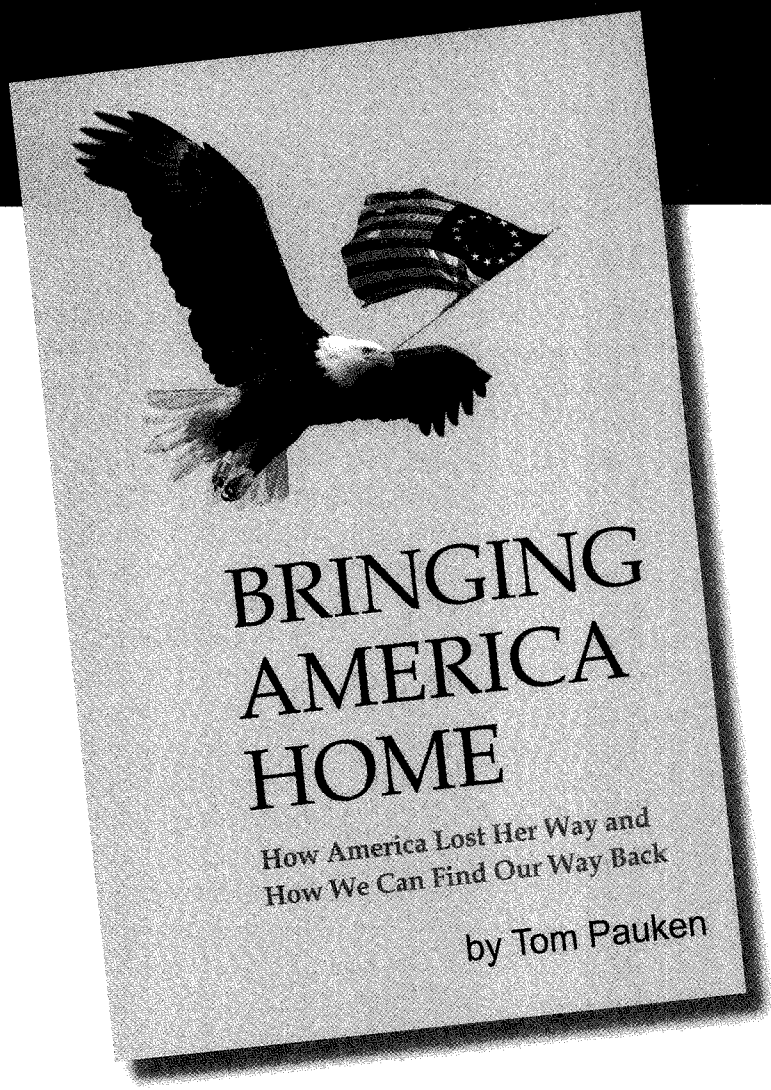

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Tom Pauken, a U.S. military intelligence officer in Vietnam, served on President Ronald Reagan's White House staff. As director of the Action agency, he founded the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program and implemented Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No to Drugs" campaign.

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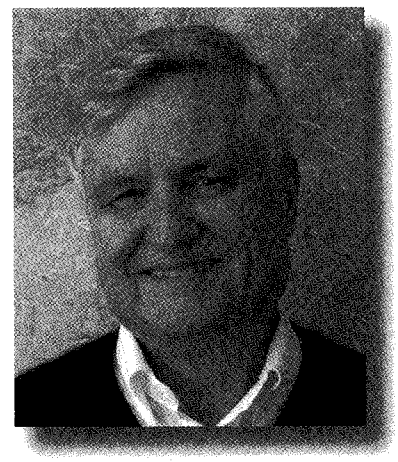

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In Darkest London, Part 1

by R.J. Stove

The following is written by a white male Catholic convert, 48 years old, who has no specialist theological training whatever, is of strictly average intelligence, and represents no interest group or political movement. It derives solely from a recent visit to London, in which nothing spectacularly horrible occurred, and which was spent mostly among people neither very rich nor very poor.

WHEN YOU REACH HEATHROW, the four things that hit you in the face are the ear-splitting noise, the confusion, the burqas, and the prevailing smell of vomit. Chicago's O'Hare is said to be the busiest and most confusing airport in the world, but O'Hare is a dream to navigate compared with Heathrow. Signage is limited and usually inaccurate; no passerby can help with directions, or if he has the knowledge to do so, he lacks the ability to convey it in comprehensible English. No policemen are visible, though CCTV cameras abound. Almost everyone is talking on a cellphone, to what purpose remains unclear, since the noise levels—one would have supposed—largely preclude thought, let alone conversation. The burqas are of a type unfamiliar in Australia, with no slits for eyes. Yet their wearers walk around assuredly enough. You are reminded of flying foxes, which are said to travel unimpeded even when their eyes are covered by blinkers.

After you finally board a London Underground train that is not so crowded as to prevent any passengers from entering, you experience a continual roaring that makes the airport proper seem as quiet as any Trappist retreat. Again, this fails to prevent the most animated cellphone conversations, consisting largely of four-letter words. After half an hour of this, you suddenly realize what is so striking about such frenzied talk—namely, that you have not heard a single educated middle-class accent. Received Pronunciation (RP), common when you were last here in 1990, appears to have died out. So has anything like a regional dialect, familiar from the Yorkshiremen who used to abound on British—and Australian—television's cricket broadcasts (*où sont les Fred Truemans d'antan?*). What you have is the sort of *patois* that only 20 years ago remained largely confined to the most insalubrious public-housing apartments.

And so, for the rest of your stay, it goes. Multilingual information centers at chief rail depots—centers familiar enough among benighted "wops," "wogs," and "Krauts"—are mostly unknown in London. You cannot buy a ticket from a machine because it will not take your money, or any money. You cannot telephone for a taxi because the public call boxes are vandalized or simply refuse to operate. You cannot ask an official because there is no official to ask.

By this time you have discovered the joys of getting on an escalator. Everywhere you look, the hoardings' advertisements are of a salacity that would alarm a Times Square pimp. (This is even truer of public pay phones, where the more complete the vandalism, the more plentiful the flyers advertising prostitutes.) Not that you will be left long to contemplate in peace the titillating posters, because at both the beginning and the end of your escalator journey you will be kicked, shoved, gouged, punched, thumped, and cursed by your fellow passengers, eager to overtake you before the ticket barriers must be negotiated.

A few days later you will notice a pattern to this kicking, shoving, gouging, punching, thumping, and cursing process. It is always carried out by whites, especially young white women. You suddenly hear the words "Excuse me, please" uttered in perfect RP English. You look around and see that the speaker is Indian. Or Pakistani or Bangladeshi or Ugandan or Nigerian. You had better cherish this courteous request while you can, because you will never hear anything like it from the local whites, unless they have Irish or Italian accents.

The Irish sales clerk or the Italian waitress will always smile. She will sometimes call you *sir*.

ON ABOUT YOUR THIRD day of London life, you appreciate that in one respect it is unlike any other Third World city in the First World—Los Angeles, say, or Detroit—that you have ever visited. The slums of L.A. and the Motor City were jungles, with the robustness as well as the vice of jungle life. This is also true of the Washington, D.C., suburb in which you stayed during the "crack wars" of the early 1990's, and which was said to have the highest murder rate in the United States. You have been accosted by gypsies in Rome who looked, and smelled, as if they had not bathed since Aldo Moro's assassination.

London is different. It is marked by two features above all: slovenliness and credulity.

The slovenliness must be seen to be credited. Traffic lights are now as routinely ignored in London, and car horns as ubiquitous, as in Athens or Cairo. Almost nothing works as it should: showers, baths, light switches, and (as already noted) most public telephones. E-mails and phone messages hardly ever generate a response. Allegedly competent businessmen will answer

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the phone by saying, not "Acme Enterprises, John Doe speaking," but "Hello." Even billionaires cannot afford a decent education for their children. (Homeschooling, it is reliably asserted, would be punished with the full ferocity of the law, just as Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel has dusted off Nazi-era legislation in order to hound homeschoolers in her country.)

Yet the slovenliness is as nothing compared with the credulity. To the spite of a Parisian concierge, the average Londoner (especially if elderly and female) adds a most unconcierge-like capacity for believing the most outrageous myths. If these myths involve blacks, Arabs, or Catholics—let alone black Arab Catholics—so much the better.

The omnipresence of the squalor, whether physical or moral, cannot be emphasized enough. Rich Los Angelenos can live in gated mansions guarded by Rottweilers and electric fences. Rich Mexico Cityites have their former viceregal 18th-century palaces guarded by loyal retainers. For the rich Londoner, no escape of any kind appears to be possible. A fashionable postcode is wholly inadequate to protect anyone from the prevailing sordidness.

There is a couple in prosperous South Kensington with whom I have been in occasional contact since the 1970's. They are grandparents, former bank clerks. Approaching 80 years of age, they both must nevertheless do odd jobs because their old-age pensions long ago failed to keep pace with inflation and they lost their little nest egg when their bank collapsed. In 1980 they would have had a Belgian or Dutch *au pair* to do the chores. Now there is no one.

One of their sons has moved back home. He attended a prestigious, very expensive local school. When he speaks at all, it is in truculent monosyllables. Somewhere in his past there is a sociology degree from a 1960's glass-box institution calling itself a university. This degree unfits him for blue-collar tradesmen's jobs. If he were a plumber, he could earn £1,000 per week, according to a 2002 report in the *Guardian*. (No doubt the figure is higher today.) A thousand pounds buys you a lot of spare time touring Gstaad or Barcelona or Innsbruck. His mother is proud that he "has an education."

On the Underground, a loud, geriatric female voice cuts through the mechanical thudding and the screeches of cellphone ringtones. It is a voice with a Lady Thatcher edge that keeps fading and then returning. "So, the trouble is, if you wanna start *fight*ing against global *warm*ing, you *have got* to start *culling the population*. It's a *population* problem, because the *nig*nogs, they keep *breed*ing. A *one-child* policy, that's what we need around here. Like the *Chay-nese* government, know what I mean?" Her hair is blue; she might be, by the look of her, the wife of a retired stockbroker. Except for her male companion, nobody seems to be paying her any heed. You notice that the train has now stopped at your desired station. You get out.

In 1990 Londoners frequently conversed on nonpolitical subjects. This former aversion to politics has now grown rarer and rarer; the topic seems to be the preferred drug of addiction. In pubs, in restaurants, Gordon Brown and David Cameron (the latter embarrassingly appeased by the mass media, much as Tony Blair was for so long) appear to inspire equal contempt. The British National Party seems to generate outright horror even among those who might, in view of their ancestry, be expected to vote for it. Yet the chief bogey is, without doubt, the European Union.

Britain has an entire media industry based on condemning the European Union in the most strident terms. These terms are not the trenchant but measured and thoughtful criticisms that, for example, Brussels resident and author Mary Ellen Synon has offered in the pages of *Chronicles*. These are expressions of pure gobbling hatred. Reading *Private Eye* (above all) on the matter gives you a taste of what *Der Stürmer* must have been like when Julius Streicher was at the height of his creativity. Since there is no E.U. threat to human freedom that has not been preempted, and usually surpassed, by the British Nanny State from Thatcher's accession to the present, you might wonder why all the sound and fury is raging. Then it hits you: a snide editorial here, a throwaway TV gag there. When your average Englishman insists that "the E.U. is a bunch of Brussels bureaucrats trying to destroy Britain as a sovereign nation," he does not really care a snap of the fingers for "Britain as a sovereign nation," since he is happy enough to see this sovereignty handed over to paper shufflers on Wall Street or to slave-driving factory owners in China. No, he is just using a polysyllabic version of "No Popery." He probably is no more aware than were the mobs described by Daniel Defoe, 300 years back, of whether "Popery" is a man or a horse. Yet he knows what he hates. And he hates the European Union because, in its origins, it is Catholic.

Most of those Londoners whom I met in 2009 were (when I knew their religion at all) either Protestants or pagans. With London Catholics the story is somewhat dissimilar. Here I do not mean such eminent Catholics as the novelist Piers Paul Read and the *Catholic Herald* columnist Stuart Reid, both of whom I had the pleasure of encountering. I mean, rather, Catholics unknown to this magazine's, or any magazine's, readers. Insofar as they permit generalizations, they were marked by one main trait in their ordinary talk to total strangers.

That trait was visceral hatred of Irish Catholicism, and of Latin Mass Catholicism among any people. The recent scandal concerning Ireland's orphanages aroused plentiful media attention in England. Never once did it occur to these Catholics—nonliterary but still belonging to the formally educated classes—that the mass media habitually calumniate; that they bellow their

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anti-Catholic agenda from the housetops; that for years the British government has wanted to destroy Catholicism altogether (most notoriously by compelling Catholic adoption agencies to deal with sodomites); and that one should therefore greet government-backed media revelations on Catholic themes with a certain skepticism. No, the *Times* had spoken, so the case was closed.

When conversing, these Catholics acknowledged no theologian earlier, deeper, or less heretical than Auberon Waugh (who once referred in print to Solzhenitsyn as "a nasty old fleabag," and whom his own father, Evelyn, correctly called "clumsy and disheveled, sly, without intellectual, aesthetic or spiritual interest"). As for the Society of St. Pius X—whose representatives are now in mutually respectful talks with Pope Benedict XVI—one well-dressed old man seemed about to have a heart attack when talking about it. "Lefebvrists! Stinking Fascists! Filthy stinking Nazis!" It was not clear where (other than, perhaps, television coverage of Bishop Richard Williamson) he had acquired evidence for his reckless charges. But he appeared to believe that no Catholic's opinion could be licit unless it had been vetted and endorsed by Benjamin Netanyahu.

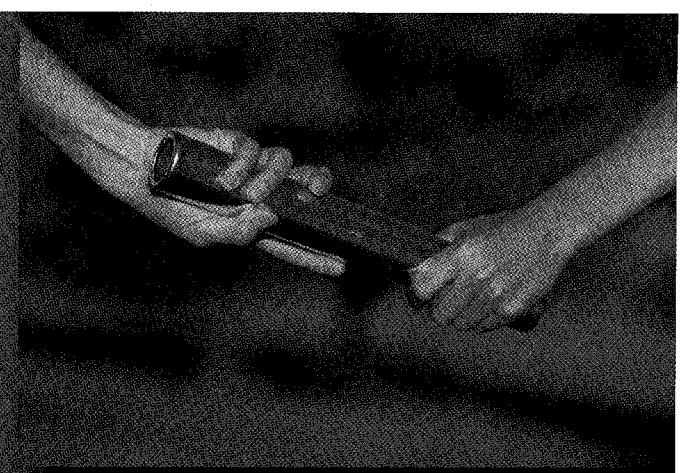
In short, among those like that old man, a strange Stockholm syndrome occurred. His was not the Catholicism of Cardinal Manning, upholding doctrine at all costs and regarding Hibernian dockside workers as human beings. Instead, his was the Catholicism of the Old Catholic aristocrats, haunted by an absolutely terrified question: "What will the Establishment think?" I once wondered why a Catholic duke of Norfolk used to march with gusto in Loyal Orange rallies. I once wondered why, when St. John Fisher opposed the Henrician coup, none of his fellow bishops could be bothered to join him. I wonder no longer.

Of course, such paradigms as those I observed are by no means confined to modern London. Pseudo-Catholic despots, from Louis XIV to Austria's Emperor Joseph II, have often aimed to set up a *de facto* national Catholic Church, Gallican or Josephinian as the case may be. But what I observed seemed to be an entirely lay-directed, rather than hierarchy-directed, provincialism. Perhaps such ecclesial balkanization had always been present among English Catholics, but had been kept in check before Vatican II.

(*To be continued . . .*)

R.J. Stove lives in Melbourne, Australia.

The Long View



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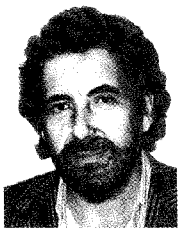

Italian Justice

I HAVE ALWAYS HATED students, a class as concrete to my mind as workers were to Karl Marx's, a race as particular in my imagination as the Jews were in Alfred Rosenberg's. Visiting a city like Florence, for me, is a painful experience, somewhere between what joining a gay-rights march would be for Taki or what strolling through most inner cities in the United States would be for a Southern slaver. So it was with some interest that I followed the story unfolding in Perugia, the Italian hillside city compared to which Cambridge, Massachusetts, is Sicilian hinterland.

Last December Judge Giancarlo Massei read the jury verdict. Twenty-two-year-old Amanda, a middle-class American girl from Seattle who had come to Perugia to ennoble herself through unmediated contact with Yurrup and the arts, was found guilty of the rape and murder of her English roommate, Meredith, who had come there to improve her Italian for a degree in politics at the University of Leeds. Amanda got 26 years; her Italian boyfriend, Raffaele, got 25.

The two girls became roommates by chance, and, according to the *Sunday Times*, relations between them "soon soured." Meredith "grew more and more exasperated" by Amanda, who "failed to flush the toilet, kept strumming the same chord on her guitar, and brought 'strange men'" to the house they shared. Amanda's "sexuality featured heavily in the prosecution case." According to her diary, among the three sexual partners she'd had upon arrival in Italy was "a man she met and had sex with on the train on her way to Perugia."

Meredith complained to her parents that "Amanda arrived only a week ago and she already has a boyfriend," but the issue was less envy or jealousy than her roommate's adopted role as her liberator, eager to remove, in the name of American cosmopolitanism, the chattels of bourgeois hypocrisy and philistine convention from the body and soul of a European provincial. To this end, Amanda scattered through the house such morally edifying objects as pornographic magazines, used prophylactics, and what the Catholic prosecutors described as battery-operated devices intended for sexual stimulation. Yet Meredith continued to resist Amanda's attempts to civilize her, and it was her obstinacy, in the words of the *Sunday Times*, that sparked "in the American a deep hatred of her flatmate, which eventually led to her murder."

Besides Amanda and her boyfriend, another youth took part in the infliction of the 43 wounds and lesions that caused Meredith's death—an African-Italian, we should say, from Ivory Coast, an orphan brought to Perugia as a child. He was the only one of the three to know nothing of art or culture, and the only one to cooperate with the prosecution. Nonetheless, after a separate trial, Rudy got 30 years. On the night of the murder, all three were drunk and, as befits partisans of honesty and plain dealing, high on hash. According to the prosecution, as the friends sought to involve Meredith "in a heavy sex game," the two men, Raffaele and Rudy, were "competing to please" its female mastermind. As Amanda held the victim by the throat, the men produced knives and proceeded to slash at Meredith's clothes, beginning, as befits partisans of sexual liberation and Hollywood morality, with the straps of her brassiere. An old woman living nearby testified that Meredith's screams sounded as if they had come from "a house of horrors."

After the verdict, U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) told the *Seattle Times*, "I have serious questions about the Italian justice system and whether anti-Americanism tainted this trial." To which an anonymous Seattle blogger replied, "If she wanted an American trial, she should have murdered in America."

BUT THE MORAL, I think, lies elsewhere. The story of Amanda and Meredith sheds light on the expansionist, imperialist, and colonialist nature of vice—and shows how misrepresented and maligned by modern culture is virtue. In fact, I can think of no cultural projection of these ultimate decades that equates virtue with something other than militant hypocrisy, a moral totalitarianism that imperils individual liberty and proceeds from a conceited and, naturally enough, secretly frustrated moral majority.

Should I be told that the moral slant of the Italian justice system, which Senator Cantwell decries, compensates for the tendency of modern, but above all modern American, culture to bestiality—in which the student class has always played the part of vanguard—I would respectfully disagree. In my view, such parity could only be achieved by stringing up the young murderess to a lamppost, as was done a few years ago near the house where I live to a man who had raped a woman, as it turned out, on the day before her wedding.

But then, Perugia is a student town. Palermo isn't. ◆

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Grades and Passes

YOUR EXCELLENCY:

This past season of mortification was my most wretched of Lents. The Ash Wednesday promises made to myself and to God lie behind me like spiritual road kill. If you were marking me on my Lenten practices, you'd rightly give me an F—a low F—and tell me to repeat the class.

Such failure brings a man low. Having watched the shenanigans of you bishops in March, however, I am reminded that misery truly does love company.

For years the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has pushed universal healthcare. When such a bill finally reached the brink of passage, however, you bishops threw up your hands in dismay: "We didn't intend a bill supporting abortion!" For grown men to be so blind, so ignorant of the world and of the souls of their fellow human beings, is pathetic.

Where did you suppose such a bill would lead? Did you believe that our government is composed of ladies and gentlemen who honor ancient Christian teachings about life? Did you not see that payments for abortion would eventually become law under such a bill? If our secular rulers maintain their present course, euthanasia not only will become philosophically acceptable but will be abetted by a government unwilling to give expensive care to the dying or the gravely ill. Another 20 years and our federal dictatorship will have convinced us to get rid of "undesirables"—the defective, the crippled, the inconvenient—not only by abortion but by infanticide.

Let's look at your support for such a bill in light of the Ten Commandments.

Thou shalt not [worship] graven images. (Yes, yes, I know, Your Excellency, that is the Protestants' Second Commandment, but it's still part of the package.) Why do you bishops so worship the state and communal action? You claim to stand for the individual, but rarely do your declarations read that way. You advocate the intrusion of the state in healthcare, immigration, and global weather changes. Can you not see that the state is a dictator?

Thou shalt not kill. You guys blew it on this one. You've just helped bring into law a bill that will lead to taxpayer support of abortion. In effect, you have made inevitable the Catholic support of abortion. I'm curious: If we all end up paying taxes for abortions, do we all then go to Hell? Or do we, like Speaker Pelosi and the late Senator Kennedy, get a pass into Heaven? (I assume such a pass exists, since both abortion supporters were never denied the Eucharist.)

Thou shalt not steal. Again, you have abetted criminality in supporting theft. To take money by force from one party and put it into the hands of another is thievery. Enough said.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. Holy Mother Church should be paired with God. By advocating state control of our lives, you bishops continually push for a relationship between state and Church. Those who lie down with dogs should not be surprised when they stand up with fleas.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods. You bishops have helped create envy and its soul mates, prejudice and bigotry. By supporting illegal immigration, for example, you have fostered another hundred years of racial disharmony in our land. By supporting healthcare, you have encouraged class hatreds.

I love my country, but I detest its government. I likewise love my Catholic Faith, but I detest its American governors. My income is less than six figures, and last year I paid out 18 percent in taxes to the federal and state government. This sum does not include the taxes accrued in ordinary living—the sales taxes, property taxes, gasoline taxes, phone taxes, and the rest.

Recently, you bishops issued the annual diocesan-support appeal, asking for funds to aid various ministries. The layman speaking on your behalf in our parish reminded us that we must raise a certain amount of money for the programs of the diocese or pay the missing balance out of parish funding. You have again exchanged your crozier for a club.

And here is my response. From this point forward, I will send no money whatsoever to the diocesan-support appeal. I will send not a dime to the Church that supports the Campaign for Human Development, with its connections to Saul Alinsky. I will send no money to an institution that cannot teach its own members the tenets of the Faith. I will send no money to a Church advocating government control of my life. I will encourage other parishioners to follow my example. If the day comes when you begin taking money directly from our parish, then I will discontinue my parish contributions as well. I will instead give my money to worthy Catholic charities.

By my lights, you and our federal government have one important feature in common: You need me far more than I need you.

Joe Ecclesia

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Land of Obama

"A CORRUPT SOCIETY has many laws," observed the Roman historian Tacitus.

The Founding Fathers knew this aphorism, and their work reflects it, from the Articles of Confederation to the *Federalist* to the Tenth Amendment. They designed these documents to save this country from the plague of "many laws." And the inaugural addresses of nearly all the first 15 presidents assured their countrymen that the federal government would usurp no powers not assigned to it in the Constitution.

All this changed with the accession of our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, now regarded by nearly everyone as the very model of a "great" president—in other words, a chief executive uninhibited by the mere letter of the Constitution.

By now time has wiped away the old scruples, so much so that we tend to forget that Thomas Jefferson seriously doubted that he had the authority to make the Louisiana Purchase (and by now it may be too late to set it right; what's done is done), and even Lincoln himself doubted his power to free any slave. (A plausible wartime pretext—punishing Southern rebels—had to be found; and this, too, may defy correction.)

How many American politicians now bother asking themselves whether the Constitution authorizes a given act? Did Barack Obama give a moment's thought to this when considering his national-health-care scheme? I would rather not ask; it seems almost pedantic now to raise the first questions that would have occurred to our forebears. But I'm afraid we already know the answers.

We now consider it a duty to legislate, as if passing laws were a productive activity, like raising crops. And Harry Truman spoke bitterly of a "do-nothing Congress," as if declining to legislate were a dereliction of the legislator's obvious duty to meet his regular quota of piping-hot statutes.

I found it amusing, when Teddy Kennedy died, that he should be lauded as a selfless public servant after a lifetime as a notoriously active roué. His eulogists spoke as if his "legislative record" amounted to some sort of service to humanity. Can't we dispense with the fiction that politics, a famously venal calling, which has to be hedged with safeguards against bribery, graft, fraud, conspiracy, treason, and the like, has some natural affinity to altruism? Have we all forgotten that the politician can only give to Peter what the tax collector has extorted from Paul?

ANOTHER APHORISM I am fond of is Richard Whately's: "He who is unaware of his ignorance will be only misled by his knowledge." A world of wisdom in those words!

Men in our age seem to have forgotten that the state can only keep its promises by force. No wonder it promises so generously. Obama, another selfless public servant, excels in this sort of bounty.

A century ago, as someone has quipped, we taught Greek and Latin in high school, whereas today we teach remedial English in college. So much for progress in education. And the pols promise to give us even more of this.

Our young President, so beloved by our intellectuals, identifies himself as a Christian and names among his favorite Bible stories the one about "Christians in the lion's den." I gather that he was not speaking in jest. Let us henceforth judge George W. Bush with clemency. Lincoln, for all his faults and crimes, could never presume a population so ignorant and gullible. It figures that Obama should be hailed as one of our brainiest leaders. Well. If we had to choose between him and John McCain, maybe his election can claim some slim excuse.

Actually, Obama has all the eloquence of a parrot, and a self-taught parrot at that. Can anyone cite a single fresh thought or phrase we owe to him? I can't think of even one time when he has caused me to say, "Hmm, I never thought of that," or even, "Well said!" Obama has benefited from what Bush would call "the soft bigotry of low expectations." Yet his rooters talk of him as if they were discussing a new Cicero.

In the future, will Illinois boast on its license plates that it is the "land of Obama"? The man partly credits his presidency to Martin Luther King, Jr., but surely King already has enough to answer for.

Can any rational man believe we might improve this country by passing even more laws, rather than by repealing thousands of them? That depends on whether you consider Obama rational. To spend more trillions on new entitlements argues a crazed conception of political reality that should give even the most reckless Democrat pause. If termites could talk, no doubt they would call what they are doing to the house Progress. ◆

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Roger McGrath

Lucky Lindy

NEARLY EVERYONE KNOWS that in 1927 Charles Lindbergh made the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, lifting off from a field on Long Island and touching down in Paris 33 hours and 3,600 miles later. He instantly became an American hero of proportions never before seen. He was termed "Lucky Lindy," but luck had little to do with it. Although only 25 years old, the lanky and handsome Lindbergh was one of America's most skilled and accomplished pilots. His airplane, *Spirit of St. Louis*, built on a shoestring budget by Ryan Aircraft in San Diego, was genius in its simplicity. Working with company president Frank Mahoney, chief engineer Don Hall, and chief mechanic Doug Corrigan, Lindbergh had the plane together in record time.

Most people also know that Lindbergh's first child was kidnapped and murdered. Far fewer know that he became one of the leading spokesmen for the America First Committee, incurring the wrath of FDR. Vindictive as always, Roosevelt conspired to destroy Lindbergh's reputation, having friendly scribes pen poisonous stories about the Lone Eagle, often lifting words from Lindbergh's speeches out of context and distorting his views beyond recognition. In protest against the relentless and venomous attacks inspired by FDR, Lindbergh, a colonel in the Army Air Corps Reserve, resigned his commission in April 1941.

The great majority of the American people agreed with Lindbergh. Every Gallup poll, right up until the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, found 70 percent or more of Americans against our entry into the war. When Americans learned of the dastardly attack, though, "Remember Pearl Harbor" became the rallying cry. Recruitment stations were besieged. I have photocopied pages from a high-school annual that include an entry under the photo of each graduating senior titled "Secret Ambition": "To kill a Jap," "To get a few Japs," "To blast a Jap."

Sharing the sentiment, Lindbergh requested reinstatement in the Air Corps. President Roosevelt, however, let it be known through the chain of command that Lindbergh was prohibited from serving. Lindbergh wrote to everyone he knew in high command. He even met with Secretary of War Henry Stimson. Finally, realizing his rejection was orchestrated by Roosevelt himself, Lindbergh quietly went to work for an aircraft manufacturer, consulting and test-flying bombers and fighters. Thanks to friends at the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, he was approved as a technical representative of United Aircraft, manufacturer of the F4U Corsair. He worked on the design and development of the fighter and trained pilots. An executive with United said Lindbergh "outguessed, outflew, and outshot" the crack Marine pilots he was training. But Lindbergh wanted more. He was eventually cleared to fly a Corsair as a "tech rep" civilian observer in the Pacific.

Lindbergh hitched rides on military planes across the Pacific to Guadalcanal. The Marines assigned him a Corsair, and he was soon flying combat missions—strafing and bombing Japanese targets, including Rabaul. All this was strictly against regulations, but Marine aviators considered Lindbergh their hero. Senior officers learned of Lindbergh's combat, but they, too, kept silent.

After 25 missions with the Marines, Lindbergh caught a ride to New Guinea to observe an Army Air Corps unit. A general gave him a P-38 Lightning to fly, and off he went on more than 30 combat missions. He taught his fellow pilots how to conserve fuel, increasing the range of the P-38 and causing many Japanese to be taken by surprise. He was flying with Col. Charles MacDonald's 475th Fighter Group—"Satan's Angels"—when the Americans intercepted a flight of Japanese fighters. One of them banked sharply and came straight at Lindbergh with guns blazing. Lindbergh fired back as the two fighters closed at a combined speed of 600 mph. He saw his tracers slam into the Japanese fighter before pulling up at the last possible moment to avoid a collision. A split-second later the enemy plane exploded, then winged over and spiraled into the sea. Radios crackled, "Lindbergh got a Jap." The news ran through the ranks, quickly reaching Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commander of the Pacific theater, but went no higher. MacArthur later met with Lindbergh and told him, "I'm glad you got one."

Neither this kill nor any of Lindbergh's other combat became part of the official record. "Lindbergh was indefatigable," remarked MacDonald. "He flew more missions than was normally expected of a regular combat pilot. He dive-bombed enemy positions, sank barges and patrolled our landing forces. . . . He was shot at by almost every antiaircraft gun the Nips had in western New Guinea." Not bad for a civilian. In 1954 President Eisenhower restored Lindbergh's commission and promoted him to brigadier general. ◆

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Obama *Versus* the Supreme Court

by Tom Piatak

THE SUPREME COURT'S power has become virtually unchecked: Amending the Constitution to reverse an erroneous Supreme Court decision is nearly impossible, and Congress has proved too timid to use the other weapons the Constitution provides to check the Court, including its power to restrict the jurisdiction of the federal courts. As a result, the Supreme Court has become, in essence, a permanent constitutional convention, and a Supreme Court majority has the power to announce a new interpretation of the Constitution whenever it chooses. Such a decision will strike down all laws contrary to the new interpretation, however venerable those laws may be and however flimsy the rationale the Supreme Court majority has devised for its decision.

This all used to be widely understood on the American right. If President Nixon had used the 1974 State of the Union Address to upbraid the justices who had struck down all laws prohibiting abortion the year before, by quoting Justice Byron White's description of the decision as an "exercise in raw judicial power," American conservatives would likely have applauded. But when President Obama used this year's State of the Union Address to take the Court to task for its decision in *Citizens United* v. *Federal Election Commission* by saying that it "opened the floodgates for special interests—including foreign corporations—to spend without limit in our elections," conservatives expressed horror. Obama was widely accused of lying about the Supreme Court's decision, which struck down as unconstitutional a federal law that had prohibited corporations from using general treasury funds to advocate expressly for the election or defeat of a candidate, and of showing *lèse-majesté* by criticizing the Court at the State of the Union. George W. Bush's solicitor general Ted Olson (who is now asking the federal courts to manufacture a constitutional right to homosexual "marriage") described Obama's remarks as a "disappointing attack on our independent judiciary"; Sarah Palin told FOX News that Obama's "embarrassing our Supreme Court" was going to be the "takeaway moment from the speech tonight"; and Ramesh Ponnuru opined at *National Review Online* that the President's attack was "demagogic." Obama's remarks were still making news in early March, when Chief Justice Roberts, visiting the University of Alabama, called Obama's criticism "very troubling."

To be sure, Obama—who raised a record $745 million in his campaign, tossed aside his promise to abide by the campaign-finance limits imposed on publicly funded candidates, and was the beneficiary of George Soros's largesse—is hardly a credible spokesman for campaign-finance reform. But Obama's remarks tracked the substance of Justice John Paul Stevens' dissent, which three other justices joined. Stevens wrote that the decision in *Citizens United* "would appear to afford the same protection to multinational corporations controlled by foreigners as to individual Americans." Indeed, even critics of Obama's remarks conceded that the decision appeared to remove the limits on U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations making independent political expenditures, and the majority in *Citizens United* noted, "We need not reach the question whether the Government has a compelling interest in preventing foreign individuals or associations from influencing our Nation's political process"—meaning that a future Supreme Court majority might indeed rule the way Obama and Stevens predict.

The notion that Supreme Court justices enjoy too little deference is hard to sustain. They live in a bubble, free from sharp criticism. Lawyers practicing before the Court are, of course, greatly deferential, and justices' appearances in public are substantially limited to such venues as bar associations and law schools, where the reception generally ranges between sycophantic and adulatory. The discomfort caused by pointed criticism of the Court may be the best hope we have of checking its power, at least until Congress is willing to start limiting the jurisdiction of the federal courts.

It is hard to see how genuine conservatives benefit from removing limits on corporate political expenditures. Generally speaking, dissident conservative candidates have been forced to rely on small individual donors because their views are distasteful to the economic elite. Such candidates have been harmed by the increasing cost of campaigns, a problem that *Citizens United* greatly exacerbates. A Pat Buchanan or a Ron Paul would benefit little from the corporate expenditures the decision permits. But it is easy to imagine multinational corporations using their economic power to destroy candidates who question free trade, Wall Street firms banding together against candidates promoting financial regulation, banks propped up by the Federal Reserve seeking to throttle candidates wanting to audit the Fed, businesses using immigrant labor uniting against candidates who want to restrict immigration, and even firms in Silicon Valley seeking to punish candidates who oppose "gay marriage." It is very unlikely that Justice Stevens was motivated by these concerns, but his dissent was correct: "While American democracy is imperfect, few outside the majority of this Court would have thought its flaws included a dearth of corporate money in politics."

Contributing editor Tom Piatak writes from Cleveland, Ohio.

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Ending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

by R. Cort Kirkwood

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW why it isn't a bright idea to permit homosexuals to serve openly in the military, consider the subject of "snorkeling."

That, according to *The Atlantic*, was one of Rep. Eric Massa's occupation specialties as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy. You might have heard of Mr. Massa. He quit his job as U.S. representative for New York's 29th congressional district after he was caught, figuratively speaking, chasing the guys in his office around his desk. Massa had the same problem in the Navy. As *The Atlantic* reported it:

> According to Peter Clarke, a Navy shipmate, Massa was notorious for making unwanted advances toward subordinates. . . .
>
> Clarke says that Massa's roommate, Tom Maxfield, was also assaulted. "Tom lived on upper bunk," Clarke say [*sic*]. "When you're on ship, you're almost exhausted 24-7. So a lot of times you sleep with your uniform on. Tom and Massa shared a stateroom together. Massa climbed up on the top of his bunk, which is hard to do—you never crawl up on somebody else's bunk. He wakes up to Massa undoing his pants trying to snorkel him." . . .
>
> Massa's shipmates didn't turn him in for fear that he would retaliate.

And that, in a nutshell, explains why homosexuals are not conducive to good order and discipline, and why the Clinton administration's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" regulation, which current and former top federal and military officials want to "repeal," was a disaster waiting to happen.

Nearly 20 years ago, President Bill Clinton conceived "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) to fulfill a campaign promise to stop the military from discriminating against homosexuals. In classic Clintonian fashion, he tried to devise a compromise that would make everyone happy. He would placate real men and concerned officers, such as Gen. Colin Powell, who didn't want homosexuals openly serving. And he would pacify the sodomites who believed they had a right to serve unmolested. In 1993, Congress passed a law, which Clinton signed, permitting the military to discharge homosexuals, but then he concocted DADT. Don't bring up the subject, and you won't be asked or otherwise harassed. Zip your lips and your trousers.

The policy was the camel's nose under the tent. The homosexuals' goal was always to serve openly, which is why DADT was unacceptable. Why the obsession with the military, a predominantly male organization? It's a target-rich environment. Military men are a staple of homosexual pornography.

But back to the history. Along comes leftist Barack Obama, who promised to scrap DADT and allow gays to serve openly, a move that apparently has the support of military men, conservative public officials, and, more disturbingly, the American people.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a U.S. Senate panel that Americans must allow homosexuals to serve openly as a matter of justice:

> [I]t is my personal belief that allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly would be the right thing to do. No matter how I look at this issue, I cannot escape being troubled by the fact that we have in place a policy which forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens.

Former JCS chairman Colin Powell backs him up. Years ago, Gen. Colin Powell explained why barring homosexuals from the military was not akin to barring blacks or keeping them segregated. Skin color, he said, is a "benign, non-behavioral characteristic," while "Sexual orientation is perhaps the most profound of human behavioral characteristics." Thus, forbidding homosexuals to serve was reasonable.

Now, apparently, he has changed his mind: "Attitudes and circumstances have changed," Powell told the *Washington Post*. "Society is always reflected in the military. It's where we get our soldiers from."

Former Vice President Dick Cheney, whose daughter Mary is a lesbian, agrees. So does Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. And according to the *Washington Post*, 75 percent of Americans agree. Gen. David Petraeus, former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, says the military should reconsider its policy.

All this is well and good, except for one thing: DADT is not "the law," as newspapers repeatedly and mistakenly report. It is a regulation that simply says, as one Department of Defense pamphlet explains, that homosexuals may not be asked to reveal their "preference":

> A person's sexual orientation is considered a personal and private matter that is not a bar to military service unless manifested by homosexual conduct. Upon entry into the Army, applicants may not be asked nor required to reveal their sexual orientation. Applicants will not be asked if they have engaged in

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> homosexual conduct. While on Active Duty soldiers will not be asked about their sexual orientation unless there is credible evidence of homosexual conduct.

Yet DADT did not alter and is not part of Title 10, Section 654, of the U.S. Code, the statute passed in 1993 that reaffirmed the military's long-standing ban on homosexual behavior. That statute says the following:

> There is no constitutional right to serve in the armed forces. . . .
>
> The prohibition against homosexual conduct is a longstanding element of military law that continues to be necessary in the unique circumstances of military service. . . .
>
> The presence in the armed forces of persons who demonstrate a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts would create an unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability.

The military may discharge a service member if it is found

> That the member has engaged in, attempted to engage in, or solicited another to engage in a homosexual act. . . .
>
> That the member has stated that he or she is a homosexual or bisexual. . . .
>
> That the member has married or attempted to marry a person known to be of the same biological sex.

Late last year, Elaine Donnelly of the Center for Military Readiness explained the law to the Conservative News Service. "The 1993 law (10 USC 654) states homosexuals are not eligible to be in the armed forces," Donnelly said. "Bill Clinton signed the law (prohibiting gays in the military) but then he issued some enforcement regulations that are quite different" from DADT.

> The policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" suggests that you can be in the armed forces, provided that you do not say that you are homosexual. Now that's "don't ask, don't tell"—that's the concept that Congress considered but did not vote for.

In testimony before the personnel subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee in 2008, Donnelly observed that Congress

> recognized an inherent inconsistency that would render [DADT] unworkable and indefensible in court: If homosexuality is not a disqualifying characteristic, how can the armed forces justify dismissal of a person who merely reveals the presence of such a characteristic?

Donnelly made the obvious point in her testimony:

> Describing the law as a "compromise" and referring to it as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" gave political cover to President Clinton, who had promised to lift the ban. . . . [D]ue to overwhelming public opposition, President Clinton failed to deliver on his promise.

DADT never became "law." Active homosexuals may not serve in the military. In some sense, then, opponents of DADT are right: It doesn't "work." But as Donnelly asks, "work to do what?" Answer: Permit homosexuals to serve without fear of discharge.

So repealing DADT won't change anything, and it may well subject homosexuals to immediate dismissal by removing the one regulatory shield they had: a directive telling the military to mind its own business about their carnal activities. Strictly speaking, President Obama must persuade Congress to change the law before homosexuals may openly serve. Then again, perhaps the military will follow Obama and Mullen's lead and simply ignore the law, then refuse to discharge homosexuals even if they trumpet their "lifestyle" or get caught.

Neither Obama, Powell, Gates, Mullen, nor Americans who answer polls serve with rank-and-file soldiers who will bear the brunt of repealing the ban on homosexuals in the military. And what would that be? Precisely the kind of behavior of which Massa is accused: in general, using the military to hunt for homosexual partners; in particular, using rank to intimidate subordinates into performing sexual acts or keeping quiet, whether they give in to or rebuff his advances.

Along with forcing women into combat, permitting homosexuals to serve openly has long been a cherished goal of the radical left. Allowing women and now homosexuals is fraught with problems. Experts predicted that allowing women would encourage promiscuity, pregnancy, and, of course, single motherhood, the latter two being major impediments to unit readiness, cohesion, and morale. That's exactly what happened.

Now, higher-ups who don't bear the consequences of that stupid decision say perverts must be permitted to serve. Perhaps if a few of them had suffered Massa's attempt at "snorkeling," they wouldn't be so cavalier about it.

R. Cort Kirkwood is the author of Real Men: Ten Courageous Americans To Know and Admire.

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A Poverty of Spirit

by Paul F. Kennedy

A LITTLE-KNOWN federal program called Supplemental Security Income (SSI) fosters dependency and destructive behavior among our nation's poor. SSI was begun in 1974 with the intention of helping aged, blind, and disabled people of little or no economic means. The disability part uses the same medical standards for determining disability as does Social Security, which includes disability insurance for those who pay the Social Security payroll tax. But SSI payments come from general government revenue, not from the Social Security Trust Funds. The SSI program includes a "child-disability" provision, in which SSI families receive extra cash for each child under 18 who meets the definition of disability. The current maximum payment is slightly over $600 per month for each disabled child, with no strings attached. There is no limit per family. Theoretically, a mother on SSI with ten disabled children could receive up to $6,000 per month and spend it as she chooses. Many families have three or four children on SSI, thus receiving $2,000-3,000 per month in addition to other welfare benefits like Medicare, subsidized housing, food stamps, and free education. Working at a minimum-wage job would severely reduce the family income.

I worked for 35 years for the Social Security disability-determination program, which includes SSI cases, both child and adult. For the last 13 years (1996-2009), I was a hearing officer, which entailed conducting hearings and making decisions on appeals cases of recipients who had been found no longer disabled because of medical improvement. Over the span of my career the interpretation of what constitutes childhood disability has gradually expanded to include behavioral problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and vague diagnostic labels such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder. If a child functions significantly below normal for his age level, he is found "disabled." For an adult, the standards are based on ability to perform substantial work on a sustained basis. When a disabled child on SSI turns 18, his claim automatically comes up for review, and he is evaluated as an adult.

The vast majority of my hearings were conducted on "age 18" cases: children who were now considered adults and in need of reevaluation under the adult standards. Most had been on SSI for years as children but had little concept as to why. The mother managed the child's check as she saw fit. (Very few cases had a father with more than peripheral involvement in the child's life.) I usually interviewed both child and mother extensively, using their testimony, along with school and medical records, in making my decision. The teen, if he cared at all about the money, knew that it was important to his mother and tried to present himself as unable to work. Some were aware that, as a legal adult, they, rather than Mom, would get the check. Very few had ambitions for education, job training, or eventual productive work, although most were quite capable of it. They preferred to stay on SSI. To an 18- or 19-year-old, $600 a month is good spending money. Many of the girls had babies and received additional funding from other programs.

The typical hearing was with a sullen teen who resented having to rise early and show up. I usually started by asking why he felt he was unable to work. The most common answer was something like "I don't like taking orders" or "I don't like someone telling me what to do." I wanted to scream "Neither do I—but that's the way the world works!" But of course, I had to be polite and explore this "disability" in great detail. Most had experienced almost nothing in the way of limits at school or at home and saw the unpleasantness of taking orders as a legitimate reason to avoid work and receive a government payment to do so.

The most striking thing to me, after interviewing thousands of SSI families, was the lack of any real material poverty. These people are among the poorest in our country, yet most of the children have their own room, their own TV and cellphone, and often an iPod or some other MP3 player. At my hearings, they wore nice clothing and shoes. No one "looked poor." Nearly all appeared healthy and well developed. A substantial portion were overweight. This lowest rung of today's American society has far more material wealth than I had growing up in Pittsburgh in the 1950's and 60's, and I was by no means poor. I grew up in a family of at least average means with several kids to a bedroom, one small black-and-white TV for the whole family, cheap hand-me-down clothing, and no electronic gadgets. Some in my neighborhood had far less. By any reasonable historical standard, today's American poor are quite well off. By world standards they have luxuries unattainable for billions living in real poverty. My experience is limited to western Pennsylvania, but I suspect it's no different from the rest of the United States.

Lest anyone think this is a disguised attempt at racial disparagement, be assured it is not. Over half of the SSI families I interviewed were white. Black and white families exhibited similar social pathology.

In a sense "poverty" is relative, and in a free society some will have much more than others. But the traditional poverty defined by extreme want has been virtually eradicated in the United States. This is an

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amazing accomplishment, unfathomable just 40 or 50 years ago, yet ignored or unnoticed in the present. It is something for which our country deserves great credit.

Yet a poverty of spirit exists among many, a legacy of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty, which destroyed the family structure and put millions on the road to dependency. The father has been replaced by government payments; marriage is passé; and crime, drugs, and illiteracy flourish. But true destitution is attainable only by willful antisocial choices like drug addiction, illegal immigration, or family neglect and abuse.

A small percentage of the SSI kids I interviewed were legitimately disabled with conditions such as mental retardation or cystic fibrosis. The vast majority were quite capable of work, lacking only the motivation. To continue them on SSI would be the worst thing I could do for them—abandoning them to a life of free money and no incentive to achieve anything. Many would certainly progress to alcoholism and drug addiction, if they weren't there already.

The American public is not aware of the destructive nature of the SSI childhood disability program. In all but a few cases, it is not disabled children receiving much-needed help. It is primarily dysfunctional families receiving cash payments that perpetuate their dependency. It is time to end the cash flow and replace it with medical coverage, or nothing at all. There is no political will or even awareness to do so at this time, so the program will continue to sow its destructive seeds unabated.

Paul F. Kennedy has had over 60 articles published in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

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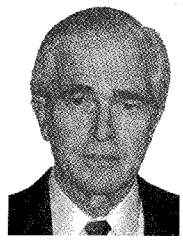

Back in the Locker

As I write, it's already been three weeks since the Academy Awards broadcast on March 7, and I'm still surprised that the judges for Hollywood's annual ceremony of self-love named *The Hurt Locker* Best Picture of 2009, awarding it six Oscars in all. The pooh-bahs of mediocrity voted for art rather than commerce, and so the enormously profitable spectacle *Avatar* had to bow to a low-budget independent production. Adding spice to the outcome, *Locker*'s Oscar-anointed director, Kathryn Bigelow, is the former wife of *Avatar*'s director, James Cameron.

Chronicles' editors decided to run my September 2009 review of the film on *ChroniclesMagazine.org* the day after the ceremony. This pleased me. It's nice having your name attached to a winner. But putting vanity aside, if such is possible, I really do believe, as I said in my original review, that this film about an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team hunting IEDs on the streets of Baghdad should be required viewing for all Americans, especially those who continue to think our adventure in the desert is honorable. Anything that advances the film's notoriety, whether an Oscar or my humble reflections, is all to the good.

Bigelow's film, made in 2008, had a limited release after a successful run at various independent festivals. Now, with six Oscars, it will reach a much wider audience in re-release at selected theaters and on DVD. Bigelow and her screenwriter, Mark Boal, a journalist who had accompanied a bomb squad in Baghdad for several weeks, have done a much better job of making us feel the awful futility of the Iraq war than any other film on the subject to date.

Of course, not everyone agrees with me. Several of the folks who read my review online and took the trouble to send in responses said as much. I want to address three of these comments. They are at once pertinent and provocative and have helped me think more closely about why I find the film so effective. I will argue that Bigelow and Boal deployed an aesthetic logic that answers each of my respondents' reservations.

One respondent liked the film until she learned that several Iraq veterans had questioned its authenticity. The vets were annoyed by the cowboy antics of the protagonist, William James, an explosives technician whose idea of a jolly afternoon is to throw off his padded shrapnel-proof suit, hunker over an IED that has been hog-tied beneath the sand, and pick through its 20-some odd wires hoping to find the single live one before the contraption blows off his head. The vets said no trained explosives technician would behave with such reckless abandon. I suppose they are right in general, but it seems to me they're leaving out the possibility that James just enjoys danger for its own sake and, of course, for the adrenaline rush that comes with it. It didn't seem all that improbable that this hot rod would ignore the rule book. Do those who perform wheelies on their Harleys consult safety manuals while pitching their bikes upright at 80 mph?

James' risk-taking opens for Bigelow the door to her film's unspoken but nevertheless trenchant politics. Consider her protagonist's resonant name, William James. It playfully invokes America's father of pragmatism, the psychologist who claimed we should believe whatever is useful to believe. Can we doubt, then, that Staff Sergeant James is meant to signify our nation's blind faith in her can-do spirit, her confidence that her sons can sort out any problem that comes their way, however insoluble it may have proved to others over the millennia? And, further, can we doubt that such arrogance led us into our current misadventures? Remember the cakewalk boys of 2003.

Another respondent, *Chronicles*' own Clyde Wilson, questioned what he took to be the film's politically correct stance regarding race. He thought the black actor Anthony Mackie, in the role of Sergeant Sanborn, had been directed to play his character as an improbably brave and competent squad leader. Dr. Wilson is annoyed by what he takes to be liberal Hollywood's rapturous depiction of minorities. They can't all be that sterling, can they? But his criticism doesn't apply here, nor does it more generally. For quite a while now African-Americans have been dramatically freed to be just as vicious, just as buffoonish, and just as dull as any witless honky. Denzel Washington's best performances have been on the unattractive side of the thespian equation.

To return to Sergeant Sanborn, the first thing to be said is that he is not in charge of the bomb squad. As his rank indicates, he is subordinate to Staff Sergeant James. Second, although Sanborn is portrayed as brave, he's not exceptionally resourceful nor particularly patriotic. And his loyalty is

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doubtful at best. Scared shitless by James' suicidal derring-do, he even considers killing his superior before his stunts get him and the squad's third member killed. Far from being the noble black of the liberal's condescending imagination, Sanborn is a man who has made a calculated bet. He has agreed to serve on the bomb squad to shorten his time in Iraq. He wants nothing more than to return home and get on with raising a family, as he explains tearfully and movingly to James late in the film.

WHAT I LIKED about Bigelow's film is that it does not hew to the Hollywood clichés. It doesn't even include a scene in which James breaks down and explains why he behaves with such disregard for life and limb. There is no appeal to a troubled upbringing, no heavy guilt for having accidentally caused a sibling's death or having once left the garden hose running all night. When Sanborn asks him how he can bring himself to sit down with primed bombs and coolly take them apart, James can only respond that he doesn't think about it. He just does it. And here's another of the script's sly political points. James is the kind of young man the cakewalking neoconservatives find so very useful to their global ambitions. There's no reasoning why in this boyo. He's efficiency incarnate, no more and no less.

ANOTHER RESPONDENT raises an interesting reservation, not about *Locker*, but about its medium. Robert Reavis agreed with Bigelow's take on the war but went on to say that she was unlikely to enlighten anyone since film appeals principally to the senses and emotions. Implicit in Mr. Reavis's comment was that only discursive reasoning can make the fine discriminations necessary to build cogent, compelling arguments. I agree with him up to a point. A fictional film narrative does not have the luxury of indulging in protracted argumentation if it hopes to hold the audience's attention. It must always move on to the next scene.

This said, we mustn't scant the considerable resources of narrative art as it moves from one scene to the next. Joseph Conrad made this case in 1910. In his oft-quoted preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* he put forth his aesthetic manifesto:

> [A]rt itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life, what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. . . . My task . . . is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand; and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.

While Conrad's narratives have discursive passages aplenty—some would say they are too plentiful—they are not why his works are remembered today. When we recall *Heart of Darkness*, it's not principally Marlow's morbid perorations on the cold indifference of the universe that come back to us, all that business about an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. No, what comes back is what the text puts before our eyes: the sudden close-up when Marlow discovers by aid of a telescope the skulls atop the poles outside of Kurtz's compound in the Congo, and the sinister whiteness of the sidewalks in Brussels, relieved only by some random blades of grass sprouting from between their blocks; the white forehead of Kurtz's self-aggrandizing fiancée, dimly luminous in her otherwise darkened parlor.

Bigelow knows how to deploy Conrad's method on the screen. No one who sees *Locker* will ever read the letters *IED* in quite the same way again. In *Locker*, these devices don't explode into fireballs, as do Hollywood's generic pyrotechnics. When an insurgent sets off an IED in a Baghdad street, the ground shivers silently at first, and then its caked mud sprays into the air with an unendurable concussion. Farther down the street, the rust on a car hood flakes and rises into the air an inch or two. It is as though the whole solid world sleeping under a relentless sun has galvanized with menace, and it becomes momentously clear that for Americans the whole of Iraq is an IED.

When James returns to his Texas home on leave, he takes his wife and infant son to a Brobdingnagian supermarket. Wandering through the aisles of plenty, he finds himself beholding a wall of cereals in day-glo boxes. The dazed look on his face tells us that the war zone has given him new eyes with which to see this familiar American spectacle. This weird consumer display is the objective correlative of the freedom George W. Bush claimed Al Qaeda couldn't abide. Imagine those robed tribesmen sitting in their caves, gnashing their teeth over our non-nutritious freedom of choice.

This is how artists work. They strive to create what James Joyce called epiphanies, moments of intense revelation. If they do their job well enough, such moments linger in the mind until their full argumentative force detonates upon later reflection. ◆

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Jewish Antisemitism

"THE ONLY THING MISSING is the sign *Arbeit Macht Frei*," said an English friend as we watched a British-made documentary on the children of Gaza. My wife, a German, winced. I did not. Watching a Palestinian father break down and cry while an Israeli official refuses him an exit permit so his seven-year-old son can have a cancerous brain tumor treated makes one's blood boil. The boy had lain in his father's arms in the hot son for seven hours, and then the family had been told no dice. Par for the course, was all I said. I'd seen such treatment of Palestinians before, in the West Bank and in Gaza, and that is the reason I will never set foot in Israel and the occupied territories again—except, of course, if the stolen lands are ever returned. The horror of what the Israelis are doing to a people, under Uncle Sam's benevolent gaze, is so shocking and dispiriting that there is only one thing to do: Put it out of one's mind and hope for divine revenge.

Since June 1967 Israel has murdered, jailed, killed, bombed, and expelled thousands upon thousands of innocents, starting with the attack on the USS *Liberty*, the observation ship she strafed and bombed on June 6, 1967. Lyndon Johnson, under pressure from the Israeli lobby, hushed it up. I have no space to list the outrages committed by Israel against all and sundry, such as the recent assassination in Dubai or the massacre of June 18, 1996, at Qana, where Israeli jets bombarded a U.N. base in southern Lebanon, killing more than 100 civilians. Gaza is Israel's best imitation of the Nazi state's concentration camps. Last year's attack on innocent civilians in Gaza made the siege of Sarajevo seem like child's play; an American government bombed the Serbian state defending itself for 73 days but secretly encouraged Israel to invade and kill more than 4,000 innocent Palestinian civilians.

Israel has always operated under a plan of deception where the United States is concerned. She relies on the power of the lobby to influence politicians and foreign policy and to discredit anyone who dares criticize her policies. She also spies on her benefactor and controls the media *via* the most successful Fifth Column ever—the neoconservatives, the Podhoretzes, Kristols, Perles, Frums, Abramses, Kagans, and Pipeses of this world. Violations of human rights by Israel are overlooked behind claims of antisemitism the moment any individual or group points them out, while past persecutions of the Jews are dredged up when license is needed to flout international law. Uncle Sam, alas, has been complicit since the Kennedy administration, writing a blank check to the Jewish state and turning a blind eye to its outrages.

SO WHAT IS TO BE DONE about the rogue state of Israel? Not much, I'm afraid. With her stranglehold on the American media, she now threatens to become, in Tony Judt's words, "the first modern democracy to conduct full-scale ethnic cleansing as a state project." Judt went further, contending that Zionism has, "for a growing number of Israelis, been corrupted into an uncompromising ethno-religious real estate pact with a partisan God."

Judt, who is dying from Lou Gehrig's disease, has been called a self-hating Jew by such vile characters as Leon Wieseltier, a Washington-based self-publicist and professional Jewish person. Which, again, is par for the course. The latest brouhaha is over Israel's plan to build 1,600 new homes in Arab East Jerusalem, but what surprises me is that the plans surprised the Obama administration. The cat-and-mouse game has been played by Israel from the start. Commit a brutality, grab some land, assassinate a "terrorist" (any freedom fighter is a terrorist), then set the Fifth Columnists on those who protest and move on to the next phase of ethnic cleansing. David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Rabin aside, almost all of Israel's leaders have been thugs whose plan has always been for a greater Israel—*i.e.*, kick out the Palestinians to Jordan and Syria and take over the whole West Bank.

America's "inalienable commitment" to Israel and its pouring of $29 billion into the country in the last decade alone have obviously returned little as far as peace is concerned. The Israelis continue to toy with American presidents, saying one thing but always doing another. Like appropriating Arab lands, which for the Israeli right, religious or secular, is the *sine qua non*. Israel's remorseless, cynical scattering of the Palestinian people into enclaves makes a farce of any talk about statehood.

There is no genuine desire for peace by the Israeli thugs, the Netanyahus and Liebermans, in the Israeli government. The last one who desired it, Yitzhak Rabin, was murdered by an Israeli. And the "existential threat" to Israel is the biggest joke of all. Armed with nuclear bombs and American-supplied superweapons, Israel is the bull in the Middle East china shop. Think of all this and weep while the neocons are laughing. ◆

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